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Short Histories of the Literatures of the World : IV.

Edited by Edmund Gosse

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A History of TALIAN LITERATURE

BY

RICHARD GARNETT, C.B., LL.D.

London
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PREFACE

"I THINK," says Jowett, writing to John Addington Symonds (August 4, 1890), "that you are happy in having unlocked so much of Italian literature, certainly the greatest in the world after Greek, Latin, English. To have interpreted one such literature and made it accessible to English-speaking people seems to me a sufficient result of a life."

It seems, however, peculiarly appropriate that a history of Italian literature should follow and should precede other and parallel histories. Symonds himself had long before pointed out that no man, at least in a single work of moderate compass, can fully deserve the credit of having unlocked Italian literature. The study of Italian letters, he had reminded us, cannot be profitably pursued by itself. The literature of Italy requires to be constantly considered in connection with other literatures, both those from which it is itself derived, and those which it has deeply influenced. It is more intimately affiliated to antiquity than any other European literature, and may indeed be regarded as a continuation or revival of the Latin. Its advent was long and unaccountably delayed—it is the youngest of all the chief European literatures; but when at length it did appear, its form, already classical, dispensed it from an infancy

of [illegible] and barbarism. It may be compared to Hermes, the youngest but most precocious of the Gods; or, like Tallis, been adult, but equal to any achievement from the cradle:

> *"The hale was born at the first [illegible] day;*
> *He began playing on the lyre at noon;*
> *And the same evening did he [illegible]*
> *Apollo's herds."*

Entering at once upon a heritage of classical tradition, Italians began to teach foreign nations long before they found anything to learn from them; and this influence is so large a part of the glory of Italy that her literature cannot be fully unlocked to the foreigner unless he is shown, not only what she has herself effected in letters, but how greatly she has modified the intellectual development of other countries. She owes nothing to Chaucer, Spenser, or Milton; but Chaucer, Spenser, and Milton are infinitely indebted to her. The position she so long retained as the instructor and exemplar of civilised nations invests her literature with an importance more considerable than that attaching to the merits of her individual authors, illustrious as these are. Yet it is impossible to elucidate this momentous department of the subject in a manual of four hundred pages. All that can be done is to indicate by continual reference and allusion that the need exists, and must be satisfied elsewhere. The influence upon Italy herself of foreign writers, and of movements common to Europe in general, has required and received fuller treatment.

Other circumstances, and these not attributable to the restricted scale of his undertaking, conspire to afflict the historian of Italian literature with a feeling of insufficiency.

From causes which will appear in the course of this history, many of the most gifted Italians wrote in Latin. From Petrarch down to Nicius Erythræus a succession of books which would have adorned the vernacular literature if they had belonged to it, appeared in the common idiom of scholars. Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, as respects mere dimension, is as nothing to the mass of his Latin works. Politian writes just enough Italian to prove that he might have revived Boccaccio or anticipated Ariosto. Pontano, one of the brightest intellects of Italy, writes entirely in Latin. To exclude the Latin books of such men entirely from consideration is impossible; but they cannot be adequately treated in a professed history of vernacular literature; and much else of deep significance must be passed over without a hint of its existence.

Another circumstance places the Italian mind at a disadvantage when contemplated solely through a literary medium. Literature in Italy is a less exhaustive manifestation than elsewhere of the intellect of the nation. The intellectual glory of England, France, and Germany depends mainly upon their authors and men of science; their illustrious artists, the succession of great German composers since Handel excepted, are for the most part isolated phenomena. In the ages of Italian development, whether of the imitative arts or of music, artists far outnumber authors, and the best energies of the country are employed in artistic production. Of this superabundant vitality mere literary history affords no trace. Michael Angelo, one of the greatest men the world has seen, can here claim no more than a paragraph on the strength of a handful of sonnets. It is indeed remarkable that out of the nine Italians most brilliantly con-

spicuous in the very first rank of genius and achievement —Aquinas, Dante, Columbus, Leonardo, Michael Angelo, Raphael, Titian, Galileo, Napoleon—only one should have been a man of letters. The reader, therefore, who may deem the field of Italian literature infertile in comparison with the opulence of England or France, must remember that it expresses a smaller proportion of the country's benefaction to humanity. Yet Jowett is perfectly justified in claiming for the Italian a front place among the literatures of the world, but only on condition that its great representatives shall be weighed rather than counted.

The comparative—though only comparative—paucity of authors in Italy is so far favourable to the historian working on a small scale, that it allows a more expansive treatment of the greatest men, and at the same time the inclusion of minor writers not always of high distinction, but indispensable to the continuity of the narrative. This is essential in a book which does not profess to be a string of biographies, but a biography of Italian Literature herself regarded as a single entity revealed through a succession of personages, the less gifted among whom may be true embodiments of her spirit for the time being. Many remarkable manifestations of the national intellect are, nevertheless, necessarily excluded. Writers in dialect are omitted, unless when acknowledged classics like Meli or Belli. Academies and universities are but slightly mentioned. Theologians, jurists, and men of science have been passed over, except in so far as they may also have been men of letters. There is, in fact, no figure among them like Luther, who, though not inspired by the love of letters as such, so embodied the national spirit and exerted so mighty

an influence upon the language, that he could no more than Goethe be omitted from a history of German literature.

Some want of proportion may be charged against the comparatively restricted space here allotted to Dante. It is indeed true that if genius prescribed the scale of treatment, at least a third of the book ought to have been devoted to him; but this very fact refutes the censure it seems to support, since, the limits assigned admitting of no extension, all other authors must have suffered for the sake of one. In a history, moreover, rather dealing with Italian literature as a whole than with writers as individuals, the test is not so much greatness as influence upon letters, and in this respect Dante is less significant than Petrarch and Boccaccio. Preceding the Renaissance, he could not profoundly affect its leading representatives, or the succeeding generations whose taste was moulded by it; and although at all times admired and venerated, it was only at the appearance of the romantic school and the Revolution that he became a potent literary force. Another reason for a more compendious treatment of Dante is that while in the cases of other Italian writers it is difficult to remedy defects by reference to any special monograph, English literature possesses several excellent handbooks to the Divine Comedy, resort to which would be expedient in any case.

The books to which the writer has been chiefly indebted are enumerated in a special bibliography. He is obliged to Mr. W. M. Rossetti and to Messrs. Ellis and Elvey for permission to use the exquisite translations from the *Dante and his Circle* of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, cited in the early chapters of the book. The

graceful versions from Baudelaire and other poets contributed by Miss Eileen Clarke have not, with one exception, been previously printed. Where no acknowledgment of publication is made, translations are by the author of the volume.

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December 1889.

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A HISTORY OF

ITALIAN LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNINGS OF ITALIAN LITERATURE

GREAT literatures, like great rivers, seldom derive their origin from a single fountain, but rather ooze from the soil in a multitude of almost imperceptible springs. The literature of Greece may appear an exception, but we know that the broad stream of Homeric song in which we first behold it must have been fed by a number of rills which it has absorbed into itself, and whose original sources lie beyond the range of scrutiny. In no literature is this general maxim better exemplified than the Italian, if, at least, as the economy of this little history demands, we restrict this appellation to its modern period. It might be plausibly contended that the Latin and Italian literatures, like the Roman and Byzantine empires, are, in truth, a single entity, but the convenience of the student precludes a view in support of which much might be adduced by the critic and philologist. Defining Italian literature, therefore, so as to comprise whatsoever is written in any dialect of that "soft bastard

Latin" which bears the Italian name, and to exclude all compositions in a language which a Roman would have called Latin, we find none among great literatures whose beginnings are more humble and obscure, or, which at first seems surprising, more recent. The perfection of form which the literature of Italy had attained while all others, save the Provençal, were yet devoid of symmetry and polish, the comparative intelligibility of the diction of "Dante and his circle" at the present day, while the contemporary writers in other tongues require copious glossaries, lead to the tacit and involuntary assumption of a long antecedent period of development and refinement which did not in fact exist. In truth, the earliest literary compositions definable as Italian are scarcely older than the thirteenth century.

There is, perhaps, no other such example in history of the obliteration of literary taste and method as that which in Italy befell one of the most gifted peoples of the world for nearly six hundred years. After Boethius (about 530 A.D.) the little that is left of literature becomes entirely utilitarian, and is, with rare exceptions, restricted to theology, jurisprudence, and monkish chronicles. There is still much evidence that the Latin classical writers had not passed out of the knowledge of men; but — except when like Virgil they became heroes of popular legend — little that they exercised any appreciable influence upon men's ideas and imaginations. One unfortunate precursor of the Renaissance, indeed, Vilgardus of Ravenna (about A.D. 1000), was led by his admiration for the classics to disparage Christianity, and suffered death in consequence. As a rule, however, the Latin poets merely served as a magazine of commonplace quotations and an arsenal of metri-

cal rules, which some of the least degenerate writers of the period apply with considerable skill. The explanation of this paralysis of Latin literature in Italy, while Greek was still an efficient organ of thought in the Eastern Empire, is no doubt to be found in the fact that it had never been a robust national growth. The property of the learned and cultivated, it had taken no deep hold upon the mass of the people; and when culture and learning perished amid the vicissitudes of barbarian conquest, it was only preserved, apart from the services of the Church, by the absolute necessity of maintaining some vestiges of law, physic, and divinity, and the impossibility of conveying instruction in the debased dialects into which the old Latin language was resolving itself.

It might have been expected, nevertheless, that these dialects would have become the vehicles of popular legend and poetry, and that, as anciently in Greece, a literature would at length have been evolved from the tales of the story-tellers and the songs of the minstrels. The very existence of vernacular minstrels and story-tellers is but matter of inference, the little which we possess in any sense referable to this department being in Latin. The instances laboriously accumulated by Rubieri to prove the existence of popular poetry throughout the Dark Ages seem to be all in this language; and centuries pass without any indication that the ancestors of Dante thought it possible to write in any other, and scarcely any that they cared for written composition at all, except as a medium for instruction in such knowledge as the age possessed, and the transaction of the ordinary business of life. The symptoms of vitality became more evident after the

Christian world had turned the corner of its first millennium. The eleventh century was in Italy an age of eminent theologians; it also beheld the musical reforms of Guido of Arezzo; and towards its conclusion poets of some note arose to chant in Latin hexameters the triumphs of Genoa and Pisa over the Saracens. Still, although, as has been well remarked, the enthusiasm for the Crusades excited by itinerant preachers goes far to prove that public addresses were delivered in the popular dialects, there is not a trace of any written Italian language, or a hint of any such vernacular literature as existed, if it hardly flourished, among the Germans, the French, and the Anglo-Saxons. When at length in the twelfth century Poetry unmistakably presents herself in the songs of the wandering students (Goliardi), her attire is still Latin. But it was much that any class of society should now be making its own songs, and the transition to a vernacular lyric was not long or difficult, although, instead of taking birth among the people, it was fostered into life by the patronage of Courts.

The first of the Latin nations to acquire a cultivated vernacular literature was the Provençal. Many reasons, singly insufficient, but cumulatively of great force, may be adduced for this unquestionable priority. The language, which may be roughly but accurately described as a connecting link between French and Italian, as its Catalan and Valencian congeners form one between French and Spanish, is better adapted for poetical composition than French; while, the Latin influence being less oppressively overwhelming than in the land of the Romans, it escaped the ban of provinciality which so long prohibited serious literary composition in the vernacular speech of Italy. Before the demon of religious

persecution was unchained by the Popes, the country enjoyed remarkable prosperity and tranquillity; the harsher features of the feudal system were mitigated by industry and commerce, while the aristocratical organisation of society ensured literature that patronage without which it could hardly have flourished in the absence of a reading class.

The early poets of Provence were almost without exception the favourites of princes and noblemen, whose exploits they celebrated, whose enemies they satirised, whose own political course they sometimes inspired, and for whose gratification they vied with each other in improvised poetical contests (*tenzons*). Their strains, though occasionally lighted up by some bright thought which Petrarch subsequently did not disdain to appropriate, appear to us in general artificial and constrained. This is partly owing to the exaggeration of a virtue, that attention to "strictest laws of rhyme and rule," in which, as an English poet truly declares, the bard finds "not bonds, but wings." But the cultivation of form is carried too far when it becomes the end instead of the means, and the Provençal poets allowed themselves to be seduced by their language's unequalled facilities for rhyming into an idolatry of the elaborate, which offered great impediments to the simple expression of feeling. Some of their strophes contain no fewer than twenty-eight verses, the same set of rhymes being carried through the whole stanza, and very frequently through the entire poem. Out of four hundred pieces in a single manuscript collection Ginguené found only two in the simple quatrain. It was fortunate for the Italians that their language, fluent and supple as it is, is incapable of such feats, and that, while

adopting their lyrical measures from the Provençals, they could not, had they wished, cramp themselves by the reproduction of the latter's *tours de force*.

It is in the last quarter of the twelfth century that we find Provençal troubadours established at the Courts of the North Italian princes, writing exactly such poems as they would have written at home, and apparently just as well understood and equally popular, a proof that neither in Provence nor in Italy had the culture of *belles lettres* progressed beyond the highest circles. One or two of them occasionally mingled an Italian strophe with their Provençal substance, and at a somewhat later date Bonvesin da Riva and others wrote in a curiously mixed dialect of French and Italian. There is, however, no proper Italian literature until, about 1220, we suddenly find a school of vernacular poetry flourishing at Palermo under the patronage of Frederick II., Emperor of Germany, an Italian on his mother's side, and by his tastes and sympathies more of an Italian than of a German prince. The character of its productions is in general wholly Provençal, but the language is Italian of the Tuscan type, and it is a highly interesting question whether this was the case from the first, or whether the pieces as we possess them are adaptations from the Sicilian dialect, which appears from contemporary prose monuments to have existed at the time nearly in its present form. We cannot attempt to decide the controversy, which does not affect the position of the pieces as the earliest undoubted examples of vernacular Italian literature. Their poetical merit cannot in general be rated very highly, and they contain hardly anything which might not have been written in Provence as well as in Sicily. Frederick himself was one of the principal

writers, and his canzone on his Lady in Bondage might appear to the English reader to possess considerable merit, but for the suspicion that the great poet who translated it infused more poetical inspiration than he found. It would gain considerably in significance if Rossetti could be proved right in conjecturing that the immured lady is a symbol of Frederick's empire in captivity to the Pope:

> "'*Each morn I hear his voice bid them*
> *That watch me, to be faithful spies*
> *Lest I go forth and see the skies;*
> *Each night to each he saith the same;—*
> *And in my soul and in mine eyes*
> *There is a burning heat like flame.*'
>
> *Thus grieves she now; but she shall wear*
> *This love of mine whereof I spoke*
> *About her body for a cloak,*
> *And for a garland in her hair,*
> *Even yet; because I mean to prove,*
> *Not to speak only, this my love.*"
>
> —ROSSETTI.

Of the few really Sicilian poets whose verses remain, the most remarkable is Cielo dal Carno, more commonly known from the misreading of an ill-written text as *Ciullo d'Alcarno.* The mention of Saladin has till recently caused his *Dialogue between Lover and Lady* to be ascribed to the close of the twelfth century, but more unequivocal indications prove that it cannot have been written before 1231. It is a piece of rare merit in its way, exempt from the insipid gallantry of the typical troubadour or minnesinger, and full of humour at once robust and sly at the expense of slippery suitors and complacent damsels. Nothing can be more delightfully

naïve, for instance, than the knight's unsolicited confession that he has stolen his Bible:

> "*Then, on Christ's book, borne with me still*
> *To read from and to pray*
> *(I took it, fairest, in a church,*
> *The priest being gone away).*"
>
> —ROSSETTI.

Some of the nearly contemporary Tuscan poets may have belonged to Frederick's circle, but it will be convenient to treat of them in the next chapter among the precursors of Dante. Of the undoubted Sicilian poets the most remarkable is Jacopo, the notary of Lentino, depreciated by Dante on account of the rusticity of his style, a defect which disappears when he is rendered into another language. Rossetti, speaking from Lentino's mask, frequently thrills with strokes of true magic, as when he names

> "*the song,*
> *Sweet, sweet and long, the song the sirens know.*"

In some of Lentino's sonnets also the germs and groundwork of Dante's lyrical poetry are manifestly to be discovered.

Something should be said here of the lyrical forms used by the Italian poets of the best ages. The principal are the *canzone*, the *sonnet*, and the *ballata*. The canzone admits of several varieties of structure, but usually commences with three unrhymed lines of eleven syllables each, followed by three similar lines rhyming to their predecessors, a seventh of a discretionary number of syllables rhyming to the third and sixth, and five or six lines on a different rhyming system, short or long at the poet's discretion, yet generally having the last rhyme

of the preceding system once repeated. The following stanza from Guido Cavalcanti may serve as an example:

> *"But when I looked on death made visible,*
> *From my heart's sojourn brought before mine eyes,*
> *And holding in her[1] hand my grievous sin,*
> *I seemed to see my countenance, that fell,*
> *Shake like a shadow: my heart uttered cries,*
> *And my soul wept the curse that lay therein.*
> *Then Death: 'Thus much thine urgent prayer shall win:—*
> *I grant thee the brief interval of youth*
> *At natural pity's strong soliciting:'*
> *And I (because I knew that moment's ruth*
> *But left my life to groan for a frail space)*
> *Fell in the dust upon my weeping face."*
>
> —ROSSETTI.

By this highly intelligent system the vagrant overgrowth of the Provençal stanza was pruned, and a lyrical form constituted, which was unsurpassed for the combination of dignity with melodious grace. The sonnet, unmatched as the most appropriate form for the harmonious development of a single thought, is one of Italy's most precious gifts to the world of letters. It is too thoroughly naturalised in this country to need detailed description; but the caution is not superfluous that a Shakespearian sonnet, a sonnet on the French model, or a very irregular sonnet, are strictly speaking not sonnets, but quatorzains; and that, although it would be pedantic to insist upon unvarying conformity to one of the four legitimate Italian structures of the sestet, they will seldom be widely departed from without injury to the music and architecture of the poem. The name *sonnetto*—a little sound—(cf. *sonnette*) admirably expresses the pealing effect of a well-mani-

[1] Death (*La Morte*) being feminine in Italian.

pulated sestet. The ballata is less confined by strict rules. "It is properly a lyric of two or more stanzas, in the first of which is set out the theme to be amplified in the following" (Boswell). It often terminates with an *envoy* or quasi summing-up, as is frequently the case with the canzone also. The octave, familiar to English readers as the metre of *Don Juan*, was generally reserved for narrative poetry, but was also converted by the Sicilian poets into a lyrical form by merging the final couplet in the preceding sestet, as described and exemplified by an English imitator:

> "*To thee, fair Isle, Italia's satellite,*
> *Italian harps their native measures lend;*
> *Yet, wooing sweet diversity, not quite*
> *Thy octaves with Italia's octave blend.*
> *Six streaming lines amass the arrowy might*
> *In hers, one cataract couplet doth expend.*
> *Thine lakewise widens, level in the light,*
> *And like to its beginning is its end.*"

The *sestine*, a favourite form with the Provençals, and frequently used by Dante and Petrarch, is too complicated to be well understood without an example.

The same phenomenon is observed in Italian literature as in English—the decay, after the language had begun to receive a high scholastic cultivation, of the simple spontaneous melody which had originally characterised it. Italian prose probably never possessed the majestic rhythm and sonorous cadences which came unsought to English poets of the time of Elizabeth and James; but Italian verse had its Campions, and these, like ours, left no successors. Without disparaging the tunefulness of late writers like Chiabrera, it must still be owned that this is in a measure artificial, and that the cause is the

divorce of poetry and music. "It seems," says Panizzi, "that the art of writing lines in which so much simplicity, smoothness, and strength were united to so delicate a proportion of sounds, is lost; and the reason is that in our days canzoni and sonnets have nothing but the name of a song." The most melodious modern poetry, accordingly, is the portion of Metastasio's plays which was actually written to be sung.

It is too early to speak as yet of Italian prose, of which no important example will be found until we reach Dante's *Vita Nuova*, near the end of the thirteenth century. It need only be remarked that the grace of diction and the intricacy of metrical form which Italian poets had attained by the middle of the thirteenth century, show that the language was already capable of fine prose, and that it was only needful to dispel the superstition that serious subjects must be treated in a learned tongue. Poetry prospered in the vernacular for the obvious reasons that the bards were in general ignorant of Latin, and that if they had been acquainted with it their accomplishment would have been wasted upon the lords and ladies for whom they principally wrote. The historical or philosophical writer, however, best reached the classes he addressed through the medium of Latin. Hence, though for different reasons, we observe in early Italian literature the same phenomenon as in early Greek—a brilliant poetical activity in the almost total absence of prose composition. Yet, when Tuscan prose fairly begins, its productions are the purest examples of diction—*testi di lingua*. This elegance testifies at once to the innate refinement of the people and to the continuous operation of intellectual influences latent in the obscurest deeps of the Dark Ages.

CHAPTER II

THE EARLY ITALIAN LYRIC

It was inevitable that the light thus kindled at the Sicilian Court should spread to other parts of Italy, those especially where the vernacular tongue had already obtained the greatest degree of refinement, and had developed most aptitude for the purposes of literature.

Dante, examining the dialects of Italy about the beginning of the fourteenth century, affirms, indeed, that none of them can be identified as the ideal or pattern language, which is the common property of educated Italians everywhere. But he evidently regards Tuscany and Bologna as greatly in advance of other parts of Italy; and speaks of the impediments offered by the local speech of Ferrara, Modena, and Reggio to the acquisition of pure Italian, in consequence of which, he says, these cities have produced no poets. Evidently, therefore, some districts of Italy were more congenial than others to the Court poetry transplanted from Sicily; and we find it flourishing exactly where, on Dante's principles, this might have been expected, that is, in Tuscany and the Romagna. About the same time, Antonio da Tempo, a Paduan, writing on vernacular poetry, admits that "Lingua Tusca magis apta est ad literam sive literaturam quam aliæ linguæ, et ideo magis est communis et intelligibilis." Almost the same words

are employed by an anonymous contemporary translator of the excerpts from the gospels read as lessons for the day, with the addition that the Tuscan speech is also the most agreeable. It is no wonder, therefore, that many of the so-called Sicilian poets should have been Tuscans, or that Tuscans at home should have been the first and chief cultivators of Italian poetry, so soon as this began to be written elsewhere than in Sicily, where the destruction of the Hohenstaufen dynasty put an end to it shortly after the middle of the thirteenth century. The transfer of literary composition from a Court circle to a republican community was of high importance as a substitution of freer influences for those by which it had hitherto been moulded, and we speedily see the new literature ceasing to be a mere amusement, and becoming in some measure an organ of thought and opinion. Political poems, satires, didactic pieces, moral exhortations in verse become frequent. The literary worth of these, indeed, is not in general comparable to that of the amorous strains which had formerly monopolised the field of poetry, but they show that literature was beginning to lay hold of the national life, and bear within them the germs of better things.

The most remarkable representative of the new tendency, who had previously been a leading representative of the old, the most influential and the most conspicuous figure, indeed, among Dante's forerunners, though far from the best poet, was GUITTONE DI AREZZO, born probably about 1235. In his youth Guittone had been a love poet, after the manner of the troubadours, and obtained sufficient distinction in the sonnet—to which, indeed, he seems to have first given what was to prove its durable form — to be afterwards regarded as the

precursor of Petrarch; but towards middle age, under the influence of religious emotion, he renounced the world, including his wife and family, and entered the military, not monastic, order of the Cavalieri di Santa Maria, known, from the free-and-easy deportment of some of the brethren, as the Jolly Friars, *Frati Gaudenti.* Guittone, however, seems to have been perfectly serious in the step he took. He condemned his former course of life, renounced poetical pursuits, and dispensed prescriptions against secular lore and poetry in all their branches. He continued, nevertheless, to write in verse, and employed the Provençal metrical forms as of old; but the themes of his muse are now morality, religion, and, occasionally, politics. His sentiments entitle him to respect, but his verse is dreary: Rossetti has been able to find only one piece of his to repay translation, and this, even in Rossetti's hands, does *not* repay it. He was, nevertheless, much admired in his own day, and many contemporary poets were much influenced by him, especially by his Latinisms; for Guittone was acquainted with such of the classical writers as were then accessible, and imitated their constructions with servility and without judgment. He has a claim to priority as one of the first writers of Italian prose, on the strength of his epistles. They are otherwise only remarkable for the Latinised affectation of their style.[1]

A much more important writer, in a purely literary

[1] The other prose Italian writings of approximate date are for the most part either translations from the Latin, which do not enter into the plan of this work, or novelettes, which will be more advantageously considered along with other works of their class. The origin of Italian prose would have to be carried considerably farther back if the *Carte di Arborea* in the public library of Cagliari were genuine, but they are unquestionably forgeries.

point of view, and the first Italian who can be esteemed a poet of high merit, is GUIDO GUINICELLI of Bologna (1220–1276), of whom little is known, except that, like most men of light and leading in those unquiet times, he was banished from his native city. His rank in Italian poetry is prominent, he gave it a more serious and philosophical character than the troubadours had been capable of imparting, and his amorous sentiment is more spirited and impressive. The masterpiece among Dante's sonnets—*Tanto gentil e tanto onesta pare*—is undoubtedly adumbrated in one of Guinicelli's. Dante calls him "the Sage," and the canzone of the *Gentle Heart*, to which the great Florentine is alluding, justifies his admiration. The following is the first of six beautiful stanzas:

> "*Within the gentle heart Love shelters him,*
> *As birds within the green shade of the grove.*
> *Before the gentle heart, in Nature's scheme,*
> *Love was not, or the gentle heart ere Love.*
> *For with the sun, at once,*
> *So sprang the light immediately, nor was*
> *Its birth before the sun's.*
> *And Love hath his effect in gentleness*
> *Of very self; even as*
> *Within the middle fire the heat's excess.*"
>
> —ROSSETTI.

Much might be said of many other precursors of Dante, but space admonishes us to restrict ourselves to two—Guido delle Colonne, a Sicilian, chiefly known for his Latin romance on the Fall of Troy, but also a vernacular lyrist of considerable merit; and Rustico di Filippo (1200–1274), eulogised by Brunetto Latini as a man of great worth, but whose place among poets is mainly that of a satirist. Very biting are his lines on a

certain Messer Ugolino, a member by anticipation of what Carlyle called "the Heaven and Hell Amalgamation Society," "who has good thoughts, no doubt, if they would stay," and

> "*Would love his party with a dear accord*
> *If only he could once quite care for it.*"

One other writer among Dante's predecessors may be mentioned, not for his claims as a poet, but as a man so illustrious that he honoured poetry even by attempting what he was unqualified to perform. He is no less a man than St. Francis of Assisi, whose *Song of the Creatures* is pronounced by Renan "the most perfect expression given by the modern world of its feeling for religion."

Some way past the middle of the century (1265) the greatest poet of Italy was born, and ere his eyes were closed Italian literature, in virtue of his works alone, had taken place among the great literatures of the world. The distance between Dante and his immediate contemporaries is much wider than usual in the case of similar groups of intellectual and gifted men, even if, leaving Dante's great poem and his prose works out of sight, we consider him simply as a lyrist. Yet they do constitute a group around him, and evince a general development both in thought and command of language, testifying to the upheaval which made a Dante possible. Many might be noticed did space permit, but it will be necessary to restrict ourselves to two typical instances, with an additional section on the cultivators of humorous and satirical poetry, whose writings perhaps afford surer testimony than those of more ambitious bards that poetry had actually entered into the life of the people.

The two men who, but for the existence of Dante, would have stood forth as the poetical representatives of their age, are Guido Cavalcanti and Cino da Pistoia. By the time of their appearance, about 1290, Italian literature had become for the time entirely concentrated in Tuscany, and the phenomena which had attended the similar isolation of Greek literary talent in Attica were destined to reproduce themselves.

GUIDO CAVALCANTI would be memorable if only for his youthful friendship with Dante, celebrated in many poems of both, and more especially in the sonnet, so well known in England from Shelley's more poetical than accurate version, in which Dante wishes for his company, along with Lapo Gianni and their respective ladies, on a voyage with him and his Beatrice. Vanna, Cavalcanti's lady-love in those days, is mentioned in another sonnet as the chosen companion of Beatrice:

> "*Each*
> *Beside the other seemed a thing divine.*"

Cavalcanti had the reputation of a free-thinker, and the charge seems hardly refuted by his having made a pilgrimage to Compostella, even if he ever arrived there, which may be questioned. It is supposed to have been on this journey that he made the acquaintance of the pretty Mandetta of Toulouse, the theme of much of his verse. He was a leading personage in the Florentine republic, and his strifes with inimical factions eventually led to his exile to Sarzana, where he contracted a disease which carried him off after his return to his native city.

Guido's merits as a poet were highly estimated by his contemporaries. Dante mentions him in his treatise *De Vulgari Eloquio* among the masters of Italian litera-

ture, and declares that he has eclipsed Guido Guinicelli, whom also he greatly admired. Benevento da Imola, the commentator on the *Divine Comedy*, names him along with Dante as one of the two great lights of the age. That these praises were not undeserved will appear from a comparison of his lyrics with Dante's, remembering that he was the older man and that the obligation was entirely on the side of the younger. Dante, especially in his sonnets, is continually borrowing thoughts which, whether original with Cavalcanti or not, had been previously expressed by him. The expression is indeed greatly improved, but even Cavalcanti's comparatively rude form is full of charm. In his *ballate* he has the great merit of having exalted a popular carol to the dignity of literature with little injury to its simplicity. Of the canzoni ascribed to him only two are recognised as undoubtedly genuine. Both are instinct with the philosophical spirit which he imported into poetry. The objections to the genuineness of the others derived from external evidence do not always appear very conclusive; but it must be admitted that there is an almost entire lack of external testimony in their favour. Four of them, from one of which we have already borrowed a quotation, have been translated by Rossetti. The most celebrated of Guido's genuine compositions, the canzone beginning "*Donna mi prega; perch' io voglio dire*," was considered by his contemporaries the *ne plus ultra* of poetry, but rather for its erudition than its strictly poetical merits: it had eight separate commentaries, which indeed were by no means superfluous.

Guittoncino de' Sinibuldi, commonly called CINO DA PISTOIA, a poet of somewhat later date (1270–1336), possessed less originality than Guido Cavalcanti, but having

a better standard of taste, is perhaps more generally pleasing. Like Cavalcanti, he was a man of varied accomplishments, and it is his special renown to have been among the first jurists of his time. Like Dante, he was exiled from his native city, and went to Paris; he subsequently professed law in several of the chief cities of Italy, and was eventually restored to his own. His verse, like Cavalcanti's, bears a strong affinity to Dante's lyrical poetry, and, in the opinion of so accomplished a judge as Lorenzo de' Medici, is even more completely divested of primitive rudeness. His most celebrated composition is the canzone consoling Dante for the loss of Beatrice, from which we quote a stanza in Rossetti's version:

"Why now do pangs of torment clutch thy heart,
Which with thy love should make thee overjoyed,
As him whose intellect has passed the skies?
Behold, the spirits of thy life depart
Daily to Heaven with her, they so are buoyed
With thy desire, and Love so bids them rise.
O God! and thou, a man whom God made wise,
To nurse a charge of care, and love the same!
I tell thee in His name
From sin of sighing grief to hold thy breath,
Nor let thy heart to death,
Nor harbour death's resemblance in thine eyes.
God hath her with Himself eternally,
Yet she inhabits every hour with thee."

Here, and in the remainder of the poem, there is a clear prefiguration of Petrarch, who admired Cino, and wrote a sonnet on his death. The following is a favourable example of Cino's own sonnets:

"Descend, fair Pity, veiled in mortal weed;
And in thy guise my messengers be dight,
Partakers to appear of virtuous might
That Heaven hath for thy attribute decreed.

Yet thou, ere on their errand these proceed,
If Love consent, I pray, recall and cite
My spirits all astray dispersed in flight,
That so my songs be bold to sue and plead.
Then, hast thou sight of ladies' loveliness,
Thither accede, for I would have thee there,
And audience with humility entreat;
And charge my envoys, kneeling at their feet,
Their Lord and his desirings to declare:
Hear them, sweet Ladies, for their humbleness."

Several other good poets, such as Lapo Gianni, Dino Frescobaldi, and Gianni Alfani, would deserve notice in a more elaborate history. They all wrought in the spirit of Cavalcanti and Dante himself, spiritualising the earthly passion of the troubadours, and endowing the ladies of their songs with such superhuman perfections as to incur the risk of appearing mere types of ideal virtue. We must, however, pass to a different order of poetry, the gay and satirical. Here Folgore di San Geminiano is the leading figure. His political sonnets are very forcible; but he is better known for two sets of sonnets on the pleasures of the months and the days of the week, celebrating, not without an undercurrent of satire, the luxurious extravagance of a set of wild young men at Siena, who, another poet informs us, reduced themselves to beggary thereby. Another humorous poet, justly defined by Rossetti as the scamp of the Dante circle, is Cecco Angioleri, who is irreverent enough to call Dante himself a pinchbeck florin, and whose favourite theme is his quarrels with his parents:

"*My mother don't do much because she can't,*
But I may count it just as good as done,
Knowing the way and not the will's her want.
To-day I tried a kiss with her—just one—

To see if I could make her sulks avaunt;
She said, 'The devil rip you up, my son!'"
—ROSSETTI.[1]

Another class of poetry, forming a connecting link with prose, should be briefly mentioned, the didactic. The *Tesoretto* of BRUNETTO LATINI (1210–1294), celebrated as an encyclopædist of the knowledge of his time, and still more so as the preceptor or rather Mentor of Dante, describes a vision in which the poet supposes the secrets of nature to be revealed to him, and is interesting as in some measure prefiguring the machinery of the *Divina Commedia*. Francesco Barberino, a notary, wrote both in prose and verse on the bringing-up of girls, and although he is an indifferent writer his work is valuable as a picture of manners. He seriously discusses the question whether girls should be taught to read, and decides it in the negative. An anonymous poem entitled *La Intelligenzia*, treating philosophically of the emanation of Divine Wisdom, a conception resembling that of the Logos, attains a higher grade of poetical merit, but the best passages appear to be translated from the French and Provençal. The religious lyric of St. Francis of Assisi and of the Umbrian school, more interesting in a psychological than in a literary point of view, culminated about the end of the thirteenth century in the lays of Jacopino di Todi, remarkable examples of impassioned mysticism, and sometimes of satiric force. He is particularly interesting as a popular poet who owes nothing to culture, but derives all his inspiration from the ecstatic devotion

[1] "*Gin my seven sons were seven rats,*
Rinning over the castle wa',
And I mysel' were the auld grey cat,
Full soon would I worry them a'!"
—OLD BALLAD.

which in his day animated a large portion of the Italian common people. The same spirit inspired the *Rappresentazioni* of a rather later period, which will be more appropriately considered along with the Italian drama.

Dante's prose works demand separate treatment; of earlier examples of prose there is very little to be said. Historians and theologians continued to compose in Latin, and the few writings in the vernacular were chiefly translations from that language. The principal contemporary book in Italian, the *Tesoro* or great encyclopædia of Brunetto Latini, is an important monument of culture, but not of literature. It was, moreover, originally composed in French.

Italian litérature had sprung up from nothingness and made enormous progress during three-quarters of a century without having produced a poet of the first or even of the second rank. There was no want of singers; rather there seemed reason for apprehension lest, as Tansillo declared with truth in the Cinque Cento,

> "*The Muses' troop an army had become,*
> *And every hillock a Parnassus grown*"—

a complaint anticipated by the anonymous writer of a clever *ballata* in the thirteenth century:

> "*A little wild bird sometimes at my ear*
> *Sings his own verses very clear:*
> *Others sing louder what I do not hear.*
> *For singing loudly is not singing well;*
> *But ever by the song that's soft and low*
> *The master-singer's voice is plain to tell.*
> *Few have it, and yet all are masters now,*
> *And each of them can trill out what he calls*
> *His ballads, canzonets, and madrigals.*
> *The world with masters is so covered o'er,*
> *There is no room for pupils any more.*"
>
> —ROSSETTI.

But the great poet was about to arise who may almost be said to have created two literatures—his country's and that specially devoted to himself—and whose own works are such, that if every other production of Italian literature were to perish, it would, on their account alone, continue to deserve a place among the great literatures of the world.

CHAPTER III

DANTE'S LIFE AND MINOR WRITINGS

CREDITABLE as were their essays in the new literary instrument of thought, Dante's predecessors can be regarded as his forerunners only in so far as they had helped to create an intellectual atmosphere congenial to the special bent of his genius. The general character of this may be defined as an alliance of the chivalrous and impassioned sentiment which had come down from the troubadours with the science of Aristotle and the thought of Aquinas. Guido Cavalcanti had shown how these might be combined, and Dante followed in his steps without, perhaps, any clear consciousness of his own infinite superiority; of which, however, a well-known passage in the *Inferno* seems to intimate that he eventually came to entertain a sufficient notion.

DANTE (DURANTE) ALIGHIERI was born at Florence in 1265, in the later part of May. The origin of his family is variously attributed to Rome, Ferrara, Parma, and Verona. The first of his ancestors whom he mentions, Cacciaguida degli Elisei, a crusader in 1147, had bestowed his wife's surname of Alighieri upon his son, and it had continued in the family. Dante's relatives belonged to the Guelf party, and had had their share in the turmoils which for half a century had distracted Florence no less than most other Italian cities. Of his

boyhood we know nothing, except that he lost his mother at an early age, and that he profited by the instructions of the most learned of the Florentines, Brunetto Latini. He appears to have taken part in several military expeditions in his youth, and the glimpses of his personal circumstances which he allows us in the *Vita Nuova* exhibit him as a man of means, mingling on equal terms with the wealthy and polished society of prosperous Florence.

If our knowledge of Dante's outer life at this period of his history is imperfect, it is otherwise with his spiritual life, which he has revealed as no other could, in the above-mentioned *Vita Nuova*, written probably about 1292. This alone would have immortalised him as the author of the earliest modern book of its class—though it had a prototype in the *Confessions of Saint Augustine*—and of the first book of genius, or indeed of any real importance, written in Italian prose. Nothing can more forcibly proclaim the superiority of Dante's mind than the uniqueness of his first production, unless it be the fact that, high as is its place in literature, its chief interest for us is its concern with the man. It is simply the record of his attachment to a young lady whom he calls Beatrice, and whom Boccaccio enables us to identify with one whom we know from other sources to have actually existed, Beatrice de' Portinari. The notion that Beatrice is but an abstraction is utterly refuted, to adduce no other testimony, by Cino's consolatory poem on her death, quoted in the preceding chapter, and can only be entertained by those who know little of love, or are entirely possessed by the passion for allegorising. If ever intense affection was conveyed in intense language it is here, while at the same time the

passion is purely Platonic, and there is no proof that it was in any degree shared by its object, who appears to have been already married.

Dante's biographers, except the late and untrustworthy Filelfo, cast no doubt on the real existence of Beatrice, and it would require very strong evidence to overthrow the testimony of the chief among them, Boccaccio, who lived near Dante's age, whose veneration for him was boundless, and who was personally acquainted with his daughter. We can perceive no adequate reason for the scepticism of Scartazzini and others respecting Boccaccio's trustworthiness. It is true that the use which he made of his opportunities falls sadly below the modern standard. Not only is he careless in collecting and verifying authorities, but he makes no attempt to think himself back into the period of his hero. "Between him and the enthusiasms of the Middle Ages," says Symonds, "a ninefold Styx already rolled its waves." Yet his faults are offences of defect, not of excess in statement, though he sins by introducing many useless disquisitions. His work exists in two shapes, a longer and a shorter recension. The latter is undoubtedly an unauthorised abridgment of the former, and the novel statements which it occasionally introduces can claim no authority from Boccaccio. It seems to have been made by some Florentine who was offended by the severity of Boccaccio's strictures upon his city for her ingratitude to Dante.

The biography by Filippo Villani, one of his *Lives of Illustrious Florentines*, written about 1400, is mainly taken from Boccaccio, but is important for its vindication of Dante from the charge of profligacy, and for its particular details of his last illness. The valuable life by

Leonardo Bruni (1369–1414) is avowedly designed as a supplement to Boccaccio, who in Bruni's opinion had neglected weighty matters for love stories and such-like frivolities. He therefore, while omitting all mention of Beatrice and the *Vita Nuova*, gives a much fuller account than Boccaccio of Dante's share in the affairs of Florence, and even cites an autograph letter of his, now lost like all others. He is entitled to much respect as a sensible and impartial writer, who took pains to obtain information; while the later mediæval biographers, Manetti and Filelfo, have some literary merit, but no historical value. Of the other three it may be said that a statement in which any two of them agree may usually be received, and that the assertion of any one is entitled to a fair amount of credit when it is not contradicted by another's. The absolute trustworthiness of the chronicle long attributed to Dinoi Campagni must now be given up; it is, nevertheless, most probably of sufficient antiquity to have preserved some authentic notices.

No biographer of Dante, however, could possibly have compared with Dante himself, and it is much to be lamented that the entire disappearance of what must have been for his time an extensive body of correspondence has deprived us of all autobiographic record except the *Vita Nuova*, which, almost devoid of incident, paints the inner man with lively force. Except Shelley's *Epipsychidion*, the world has nothing to set beside this dithyrambic of purely Platonic passion. We must recur to it, and need only here fix the death of Beatrice, one of the great landmarks of Dante's life, at June 9, 1290. Somewhat more than a year afterwards we find Dante moved, as a noble soul might well be, not by the attrac-

tions but by the spiritual sympathy of a compassionate lady. It is impossible to entertain the least doubt of the reality of an episode described by himself with such tenderness of self-excuse and poignancy of self-reproach, but to admit it is to admit the actuality of all the rest of the *Vita Nuova:*

> "*The salt stream that did sorrowfully flow,*
> *Speeded, ye Eyes, from your deep springs apace,*
> *Gave marvel unto all who such long space*
> *Beheld you weeping, as yourselves do know.*
> *Now fear I that all such ye would forgo,*
> *If I upon my own part would be base,*
> *And not all shift and subterfuge displace,*
> *Reminding you of her who made your woe.*
> *Your levity lays load of heavy thought*
> *Upon me, sore disquieted with dread*
> *Of her who looks on you in wistful wise.*
> *By nothing less than Death should you be wrought*
> *E'er to forget your Lady who is dead;*
> *Thus saith my heart, and afterward it sighs.*"

Dante appears to say that he entirely overcame this rather regrettable than reprehensible lapse from his ideal, and we believe him. If so, the pitiful lady cannot be identified with Gemma Donati, whom, at latest in 1293, if she had really borne him seven children by 1300, he married by the persuasion of his friends. The *Vita Nuova* was in all probability written by this time, and from its conclusion we learn that Dante was even then preparing to celebrate Beatrice in the *Divina Commedia.* It is therefore exceedingly improbable that he would have wedded one at all likely to impair or efface the freshness of her image in his soul; and though his union with Gemma was apparently untroubled by discord, it probably lacked all consecration but the ceremonial. It

was brought to a close by Dante's exile from his native city in 1301. Gemma and the children did not accompany him, and he never saw them more. The reason is not difficult to discover: it prefigured the case of Milton. Gemma's family, the Donati, had come to belong to a party opposed to Dante. The interests of her numerous children, mostly of very tender age, undoubtedly counselled Gemma to cleave to the winning side, and she can scarcely be blamed if she declined to forsake her blood relations for a husband whom she had probably found unsympathetic. Whether Dante approved her course, or rejoiced in his liberty (Short-sighted Devil, not to take his spouse!), or was simply choked by indignation, he never honours or dishonours her by a single word. Gemma Donati's portrait hangs in the gallery of poets' wives, like Marshal Marmont's in the gallery of French marshals, covered by a veil of crape.

Few of the more distinguished Italian men of letters have been able to keep themselves clear of public employment. Dante's wealth and social eminence in the days of his prosperity did not allow him to decline the invidious office of Prior, to which he was raised in 1300. It was only tenable for two months, but this was long enough for his ruin. Florence was then rent by dissensions between two factions, the Whites and Blacks. The Government, by Dante's courageous and probably wise advice, resolved to banish the leaders of both. As the chiefs of the Guelfic Blacks were Dante's own connections, the Donati, while the Ghibelline Whites included Guido Cavalcanti, his most intimate friend, his counsel must have been patriotic and disinterested. Unfortunately, it was not unflinchingly carried out, some of the Whites being shortly afterwards allowed

to return. Pope Boniface VIII., fearing that the Ghibelline or Imperialist party would thus obtain the upper hand in the city, incited Charles de Valois, brother of the French King, Philip the Fair, whom he had allured into Italy to attack the King of Naples, to make himself master of Florence. This he accomplished, and the consequent return of Dante's adversaries led to the sacking of his house, the ruin of his fortune, and his life-long exile from his native city. He was at the time absent on an embassy at the Papal Court, from which he retired to Arezzo, where the other exiles had assembled, and must henceforth be reckoned among the Ghibellines.

For some years Dante participated in their endeavours to reinstate themselves by force; but eventually, well-nigh as disgusted with his friends as with his enemies, scorning the ignominious terms on which alone return would have been permitted, and especially discouraged by the failure of the Emperor Henry VII., whose advent to Italy he had welcomed with enthusiasm, he became a wanderer among the courts of the princes and nobles of Northern Italy, generally finding honour and protection, which he frequently repaid by diplomatic services. There seems no doubt of his having visited Paris and studied in the University. The alleged extension of his journey to Oxford is unsupported by convincing evidence, but is not impossible or improbable. A writer near his own day seems to assert that he had been in England. During all this time, like his ancient prototype Thucydides, he was devoting himself to his immortal work, which, published as the respective parts were completed, brought him celebrity and wondering reverence even in his lifetime. His most distinguished patron in his later years was Cane della Scala, surnamed the

Great, Lord of Verona, from whose court he retired in 1320 to that of Guido Novello da Polenta, at Ravenna. In the following year he undertook a mission to Venice, and there contracted a fever, which, aggravated it is said by the inhospitality of the Venetians in compelling him to return by land, carried him off on September 14, 1321, shortly after he had completed his great epic. His funeral obsequies were celebrated with magnificence; but political troubles delayed for a hundred and sixty years the erection of the monument ultimately raised by the piety of Cardinal Bembo's father, then governing Ravenna for the Venetians, and inscribed with six rhyming Latin verses attributed without adequate evidence to Dante's own pen, but sufficiently ancient to have been expanded by Boccaccio into a noble sonnet:

"Dante am I, of deepest lore in song
Hierophant, elected to combine
Inheritance in Art with Nature's sign,
Accounted miracle all men among.
Wings of Imagination sure and strong
Bore me through worlds infernal and divine,
And gave to verse immortal to consign
What doth to Earth or doth to Heaven belong.
Bright Florence brought me forth, but her fond son
To bitter exile drove, step-mother made
By guile of tongues malevolent and base.
Ravenna sheltered me; in her is laid
My dust; my spirit thitherward has gone
Where Wisdom reigns, and Envy hath not place."

It is usual to commence a review of an author's productions by his most important work; but the *Divina Commedia* requires a chapter to itself, and precedence must consequently be given to Dante's minor writings. Of these the *Vita Nuova* stands first both in time and

in importance. It is epoch-making in many ways, as the first great example of Italian prose, the first revelation of the genius of the greatest mediæval poet, and the incarnation of that romantic conception of ideal love by which the Middle Age might fairly claim to have augmented the heritage bequeathed by antiquity. The main note of Dante's genius here is its exquisite and unearthly spirituality, which, indeed, is visible in much of the poetry and art of the time, but attains its most intense expression in him. Something like it has occasionally been seen since, as in John Henry Newman; but it is in our day too much out of keeping with the legitimate demands of a busy and complicated society to occur except as a temporary and individual phenomenon.

Nothing is more remarkable in a composition apparently so fanciful than the entire sincerity and straightforwardness of the *Vita Nuova*: grant that Beatrice was a real person, and it is impossible to doubt the literal truth of the entire narrative. This is the more extraordinary in consideration of the impersonality alike of the enamoured poet and of the object of his passion. Dante, indeed, speaking throughout in his own character, cannot help portraying himself in some measure, though our conception of him is probably largely made up of involuntary associations with the more palpable Dante of the *Divina Commedia*. But Beatrice remains what he meant her to be, a spiritual presence, visible but intangible. No heroine of fiction conveys a stronger impression of perfection; but we see her as Andromeda saw Medusa, merely reflected in the mind of her lover.

More extraordinary works than the *Vita Nuova* have

been composed at even an earlier age, but there is perhaps no other book in the world in which a young man appears as asserting by his first attempt so unchallenged a superiority over predecessors and contemporaries, with whom he has nevertheless much in common. The evolution of Italian poetry has up to this point proceeded gradually and systematically; all of a sudden it makes a bound, and seems as it were to have sprung across a chasm. The prose is of more equable desert than the interspersed poetry, some of which is inferior; while, on the other hand, the best poetry far transcends the prose. The finest among the sonnets and canzoni, if sometimes rivalled, have not hitherto been surpassed in Italian literature, while the most famous of the former still stands at the head of its own class:

"*So goodly and so seemly doth appear*
My Lady, when she doth a greeting bring,
That tongue is stayed, silent and quivering,
And eye adventures not to look on her.
She thence departeth, of her laud aware,
Meek in humility's apparelling;
And men esteem her as a heavenly thing
Sent down to earth a marvel to declare.
Whoso regardeth, so delightedly
Beholds, his eyes into his heart instil
Sweet only to be known by tasting it;
And from her face invisibly doth flit
A gentle spirit Love doth wholly fill,
That to the soul is ever saying, Sigh."

The length of Italian canzoni renders it extremely difficult to do them justice in a work of necessarily contracted limits. Two stanzas, however, of Dante's canzone on the death of his lady are, as it were, a little

poem complete in themselves, and may be cited in Rossetti's matchless version:

> "*I was a-thinking how life fails with us*
> *Suddenly after such a little while;*
> *When Love sobbed in my heart, which is his home,*
> *Whereby my spirit waxed so dolorous*
> *That in myself I said, with sick mind:*
> *'Yea, to my Lady too this Death must come.'*
> *And therewithal such a bewilderment*
> *Possessed me, that I shut mine eyes for pain;*
> *And in my brain did cease*
> *Order of thought, and every healthful thing.*
> *Afterwards, wandering*
> *Amid a swarm of doubts that came and went,*
> *Some certain women's faces hurried by,*
> *And shrieked to me, 'Thou too shalt die, shalt die!'*
>
> *Then saw I many broken, hinted sights*
> *In the uncertain state I stepped into.*
> *Meseemed to be I knew not in what place,*
> *Where ladies through the streets, like mournful lights,*
> *Ran with loose hair, and eyes that frightened you*
> *By their own terror, and a pale amaze:*
> *The while, little by little, as I thought,*
> *The sun ceased, and the stars began to gather,*
> *And each wept at the other;*
> *And birds dropped in mid flight out of the sky,*
> *And earth shook suddenly,*
> *And I was 'ware of one, hoarse and tired out,*
> *Who asked of me, 'Hast thou not heard it said?*
> *Thy lady, she that was so fair, is dead.'*"

Although the *Vita Nuova* is essentially true history, the same cannot be said of a later work preferred to it by the author himself, albeit posterity has reversed his judgment. This is the *Convito*, or *Banquet*, in which Beatrice appears as an allegory of divine philosophy. The process of this mutation is not difficult to discover.

Not long after her death, Dante, as he tells us at the end of the *Vita Nuova*, had resolved, under the influence of a wondrous vision, "*di dire di lei quello che mai non fu detto d'alcuna.*" The mortal maiden thus necessarily becomes a type of supernatural glory and perfection, as we see her in the *Divina Commedia*, and the metamorphosis inevitably extends to the lyrics in which Dante celebrates her. She is no longer Beatrice de' Portinari, but Philosophy, and unfortunately in too many instances Dante's poetry has become philosophy also. The nobility of the form still assures it pre-eminence over all contemporary verse but the author's own; but the substance is often mere reasoning in rhyme. Two canzoni, however, are of distinguished beauty, "*Voi ch' intendendo il terzo ciel movete*" (translated by Shelley), and "*Tre donne intorno al cor mi son venute,*" which Coleridge says, in 1819, he is at length beginning to understand after reading it over twelve times annually for the last fourteen years. "Such a fascination had it in spite of its obscurity!"

The former of these pieces is shown by internal evidence to have been written as early as 1295, and the latter was composed after Dante's banishment, to which period most of the other canzoni and the prose commentary probably belong. This commentary constitutes the substance of the work. It was intended to have expounded fourteen canzoni, but treats only of three, apart from a general introduction. More remarkable, perhaps, than the philosophical subtleties of which it consists, is Dante's appeal to a new public. He writes no longer for literary circles, but for the world of persons of worth wherever found, especially persons of rank. Hence the treatise is necessarily composed in Italian, which has the good

effect of drawing from Dante a spirited vindication of his native tongue. It was probably completed up to the point where the author left it by 1308 or 1309. The exceedingly corrupt text has been revised by the last editor, Dr. Moore, upon the authority of two manuscripts in England.

The literary merits of the Italian language are more fully expounded in another work of Dante's, which, however, he composed in Latin, that his arguments might reach those who would not have condescended to read the vernacular. The *De Vulgari Eloquio*, originally entitled *De Eloquentia Vulgari*, or *Of the Vulgar Tongue*, is shown by historical allusions to have been composed by 1304. Like the *Convito* it is unfinished, only two books of the four of which it was to have consisted having been written. Dante's conception of the capabilities of his native tongue does him honour, even though he restricts the number of subjects adapted to it, and would deny its use to all but gifted writers. It is a still higher honour to have recommended it more effectually by his example than by his reasonings, which, as was inevitable in his age, frequently rest upon entirely fanciful and visionary data. His account, nevertheless, of the Italian dialects as they existed in his day, and his precepts on the metrical structure of Italian poetry, which he seems not to have then contemplated as capable of existing apart from music, retain a substantial value for all time.

The hopes founded upon the appearance of the Emperor in Italy in 1311 probably induced Dante to publish a work written some years previously, his treatise *De Monarchia*, embodying the best mediæval conception of the spheres of temporal and spiritual

government upon earth. So powerfully had the universality of Roman sway impressed men's minds, that the Roman people were believed to have obtained the empire of the earth by the donation of Heaven, and the Emperor of Germany was regarded as their lawful representative. This belief, so strange to us, was, nevertheless, salutary in its time, by repressing the champions of universal despotism who made the Pope the fountain of secular as well as spiritual authority. By numerous arguments satisfactory to himself, but which would now be considered entirely irrelevant, Dante proves that universal monarchy is a portion of the Providential scheme, that the Romans possessed by divine appointment jurisdiction over the entire earth. The inheritance of this prerogative by the Emperor of Germany is taken for granted, and it is next demonstrated that the Emperor does not derive his authority from the Church, any more than the Church hers from the Emperor. Yet Cæsar is to be reverent to Peter, as the first-born son to his father. There is no trace of religious heterodoxy in the treatise, though nothing can be more uncompromising than its limitation of the Papal authority to its legitimate sphere.

The amount of fugitive poetry ascribed to Dante is inconsiderable. Bruni, in his biography, remarks that there are two classes of poets—those who sing by inspiration and those who compose by art—and that Dante belongs to the second. It cannot be admitted that Dante was devoid of inspiration, but it is certainly true that he was one of those who possess a special power of regulating this divine gift. A Shelley or a Coleridge must write when the impulse seizes him; but a Milton, with the conception of *Paradise Lost* in his mind, can

defer putting pen to paper for seventeen years, and, with consummate lyric power, is but unfrequently visited by the lyric impulse. Dante, so marvellously similar to Milton in many respects, also, if we may trust his account of the genesis of the pieces in the *Vita Nuova*, but seldom found himself under an irresistible impulse to lyrical composition. Something suggests to him that a sonnet or a canzone would be expedient or decorous; he plots it out, and fills up the outline with unerring fidelity to his first conception. The gigantic plan of the *Divine Comedy* is similarly carried out without interruption or misgiving; and but for the death of Beatrice, it is by no means certain that it would have existed, any more than that Milton would have written *Comus* if the noble children had never been lost in the wood.

A poet of this stamp was not likely to enrich literature with much fugitive verse. A few occasional poems glitter here and there, to employ Wordsworth's simile, like myrtle leaves in his chaplet of bay. The most remarkable among them is a sestine, the finest example of its artificial and elaborate class, and superbly translated by Rossetti; this and other pieces are supposed to refer to a certain Pietra, otherwise unknown. These poems seem to breathe the language of genuine passion, but are too few and of too uncertain date to contribute much to the solution of the question whether Dante was, as Boccaccio asserts, remarkable for susceptibility to female charms, or a paragon of continence, as Villani will have him. It is at least certain that, after Beatrice, no woman exercised any noteworthy influence upon his writings. He moves through life a great, lonely figure, estranged from human fellowship at every point; a citizen of eternity, misplaced and

ill-starred in time; too great to mingle with his age, or, by consequence, to be of much practical service to it; too embittered and austere to manifest in action the ineffable tenderness which may be clearly read in his writings; one whose friends and whose thoughts are in the other world, while he is yet more keenly alive than any other man to the realities of this; one whose greatness impressed the world from the first, and whom it does not yet fully know, after the study of six hundred years.

CHAPTER IV

THE DIVINE COMEDY

To have assumed a position so far in advance of, and so decisively discriminated from, that of any of his contemporaries, as in the *Vita Nuova*, would alone have ensured Dante immortality as a poet. But his lyrical works are to his epic as Shakespeare's sonnets to Shakespeare's dramas.

Any narrative in verse not familiar or humorous, nor of extreme brevity, may be entitled an epic; although we might do well to naturalise, as we have done in the case of *idyll*, the pretty Greek word *epyll* to denote a narrative composition of such compass as Keats's *Eve of St. Agnes* or Wordsworth's *Laodamia*. But there are at least three classes of epics, excluding the merely romantic like the *Orlando*, and the mock-heroic, from consideration. The most important in every point of view is the national, originally not the work of a man but of a people; sometimes, as in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, indebted for its final form to the shaping hand of the most consummate genius; sometimes, as in the Finnish *Kalevala*, an agglomeration of legends, united by community of spirit, but not fashioned into an artistic whole. At the remotest point from these stands the artificial epic, like the *Teseide* of Boccaccio or the *Jason* of William Morris, where the poet has selected for its

mere picturesqueness a subject which stands in no vital relation to himself and his times; and such epics are necessarily the most numerous.

Yet there is an intermediate class of epic, partly national, partly artificial, where the poet, conscious of a high patriotic purpose, has, like Virgil and Camoens, sung the glories of his country at their zenith; or, like Lucan, actually related contemporary history; or, like Shelley in the *Revolt of Islam*, bodied this forth under the veil of allegory; or, like Tasso, embalmed ere too late the feeling of an age passing away. Two great epic poets of the intermediate class have done more than this: they have preserved and expressed the sentiment of their age, its replies to the deepest questions which man can propound; have clothed these abstractions with form, colour, and music, and have lent fleeting opinion an adamantine immortality. These are Dante and Milton.

"Dante," says Shelley, "was the second epic poet, that is, the second poet the series of whose creations bore a defined and intelligible relation to the knowledge and sentiment and religion of the age in which he lived. Milton was the third." Hence Shelley in another place calls Milton "the third among the sons of light." Both these great men, in truth, versed in all the learning of their ages, and entertaining a conviction of the indefeasible truth of what they believed themselves to know which no successor will be able to share, applied themselves to embody these beliefs in works of genius. Even as great empires have vanished from the earth, and left nothing but the works of art which were not the greatness itself but merely its testimonies and symbols, so here the opinions have gone while the works remain. It almost

seems a law that every great poem which thus resumes the thought of an age shall be a song, not of Carlyle's phœnix "soaring aloft, hovering with outstretched wings, filling earth with her music," but rather of the same phœnix "with spheral swan-song immolating herself in flame, that she may soar the higher and sing the clearer." Homer's theology, we may be sure, was already obsolete for the higher Greek mind when, or not long after,

> "*The Iliad and the Odyssee*
> *Rose to the swelling of the voiceful sea.*"

Our own national epic, Shakespeare's series of historical plays, could not be written until the state of society it depicted was ceasing to exist.

Dante himself has told us the origin of his poem. In the last sonnet of his *Vita Nuova* he represents himself as having in thought followed Beatrice from earth to heaven:

> "*Beyond the sphere that doth all spheres enfold*
> *Passes the sigh that from my heart takes flight,*
> *By weeping Love with new perception dight*
> *Sure way to the ethereal vault to hold;*
> *Then having won unto that height untold,*
> *Of Lady throned in honour hath he sight,*
> *Resplendent so, that by the vesturing light*
> *The spirit peregrine doth her behold.*
> *So seen, that when he doth report the same,*
> *I miss his sense, so subtle doth it seem*
> *Unto the grieving heart that makes demand;*
> *Yet know I that my Lady is his theme,*
> *For oft he nameth Beatrice's name,*
> *And then, dear Ladies, well I understand.*"

Here is the germ of the *Paradiso*, at all events; but, to preclude all misapprehension, Dante adds: "After

this sonnet there appeared to me a wondrous vision, wherein I beheld things which made me resolve to say no more concerning my Blessed One until I could treat of her more worthily. And that I may attain unto this I study with all my might, as she truly knoweth. Wherefore if it shall be the pleasure of Him by whom all things live that my life shall yet endure for some years, I hope to say concerning her that which has never been said concerning any woman." The *Vita Nuova* is believed to have been written about 1294. At this time, therefore, Dante was meditating a poetical apotheosis of Beatrice on a scale surpassing anything attempted before, although the natural inference from his words would seem to be that he had not yet begun to write.

He would probably at first contemplate nothing more than the expansion of the thought of his sonnet into a vision somewhat resembling that of Laura in Petrarch's *Trionfi;* but ere long he might say to himself, inverting the question which Ellwood the Quaker addressed to Milton: "Thou hast told us of Paradise *gained*, what hast thou to tell us of Paradise *lost?*" and, granted the existence of the intermediate realm of Purgatory, the entire scheme of the *Divina Commedia* would be present to his mind. As poets but rarely "imitate the example of those two prudent insects the bee and the spider," he would begin with the *Inferno*, where, notwithstanding the inscription, offensive to an age as far in advance of its sentiment as Dante himself was in advance of Homer's polytheism and anthropomorphism, which he has thought fit to place upon the portal, Beatrice could have neither part nor lot. It must be long indeed before he could rejoin her.

It can hardly be said, then, that Beatrice is the heroine

of his poem, unless Helen of Troy is the heroine of the *Iliad*. Neither poem could have existed without the woman; the action of each turns entirely upon her; but the appearance of each is infrequent until, in Beatrice's case, she appears as the pervading spirit of the *Paradiso*. Yet, had we merely known her from the *Divina Commedia*, their opinion who regard her as a mere symbol would not have appeared so groundless as it must in the light of the transparent autobiography of the *Vita Nuova*. If the great epic has given her her world-wide fame, she is indebted for her personality to the brief lyrics and snatches of impassioned prose. The old love, though not extinct, had been transformed into something far more expansive, as alchemists are said to revive a glowing rose from the ashes of a faded one. When Dante himself essays to give Can Grande some insight into the purpose of his poem, he does not mention Beatrice, but says: "The object of the whole work is to make those who live in this life leave their state of misery, and to lead them to a state of happiness." By this, as Symonds points out, is not to be understood that the purpose of the poem was the admonition of individuals. "It was both moral and political. The *status miseriæ* was the discord of divided Christendom as well as of the unregenerate will; the *status felicitatis* was the pacification of the world under the coequal sway of Emperor and Pope in Rome, as well as the restoration of the human soul to faith."

The conception, therefore, was essentially mediæval. It expressed the beliefs and aspirations of the Middle Age. It was in poetry what the work of another of the greatest of the Italians, St. Thomas Aquinas, had been in theology and philosophy—an endeavour to stereotype

the dominant convictions of the age. And therefore, although not among the only genuine epics in the highest sense—those which the nations have written for themselves—the *Divina Commedia* approaches these more nearly than any other epic of the second class; for, although the utterance of a single voice, it says what the average mediæval man would have said had he known how. The nearest parallel is Milton's epic, which sets forth the view of divine things which had commended itself to a large portion of the Christian world, but still only to a portion, and therefore a less memorable deliverance than Dante's. One needs only to consider how much lower the Middle Ages would stand in our estimation if their great interpreter had never written, to appreciate the enormous importance of Dante's work for history and culture.

Dante's great position, nevertheless, in this point of view, somewhat detracts from his originality in other respects. He is the man of his age, not a man in advance of his age. He does not, like Goethe, point the path of progress along an illimitable future. He has no prevision of Bacon and Galileo; nor is he fertile in germs, hints, or prefigurements of greater things to come. His philosophy is that of Aquinas, and his science that of Aristotle. This in no way impairs his poetical power, and it still remains the greatest of marvels that the transcendent poet and the most representative thinker of the age should have met in the same person. Much that appears original in him is really not peculiar to him, as, for instance, his generous treatment of the heathen world. There was nothing in this that could surprise any contemporary. The beatification of the Emperor Trajan was already an approved legend,

of his poem, unless Helen of Troy is the heroine of the *Iliad*. Neither poem could have existed without the woman; the action of each turns entirely upon her; but the appearance of each is infrequent until, in Beatrice's case, she appears as the pervading spirit of the *Paradiso*. Yet, had we merely known her from the *Divina Commedia*, their opinion who regard her as a mere symbol would not have appeared so groundless as it must in the light of the transparent autobiography of the *Vita Nuova*. If the great epic has given her her world-wide fame, she is indebted for her personality to the brief lyrics and snatches of impassioned prose. The old love, though not extinct, had been transformed into something far more expansive, as alchemists are said to revive a glowing rose from the ashes of a faded one. When Dante himself essays to give Can Grande some insight into the purpose of his poem, he does not mention Beatrice, but says: "The object of the whole work is to make those who live in this life leave their state of misery, and to lead them to a state of happiness." By this, as Symonds points out, is not to be understood that the purpose of the poem was the admonition of individuals. "It was both moral and political. The *status miseriæ* was the discord of divided Christendom as well as of the unregenerate will; the *status felicitatis* was the pacification of the world under the coequal sway of Emperor and Pope in Rome, as well as the restoration of the human soul to faith."

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who had, however, the sixth book of the *Æneid* by heart, and implies his obligation by making Virgil his guide. This is a much more likely source for his poem than the vision of Tundal and other similar mediæval legends, which are nevertheless important as showing how strong was the hold of the conception upon the popular mind. The vast difference between Virgil's treatment and Dante's needs no elucidation. Virgil writes like a philosopher, and Dante like a prophet. There is, no doubt, abundance of allegory in the *Divina Commedia*, but, generally speaking, the poet's vision is direct and immediate. Symonds puts the essence of the poem into a word by calling it apocalyptic, and perhaps there is no other great work to which on the whole it presents so close an analogy as the Revelation of St. John; but neither this nor any forerunner affords any precedent for Dante's astonishing innovation of peopling the unseen worlds mainly with his own and his readers' contemporaries, men whose hands he had clasped or repelled, with whom he had sat at the council-board or whom he had encountered in conflict, or who, personally unknown, had thrilled him with the report of their fortunes or misfortunes, their good deeds or their crimes.

Let any one try to imagine a modern poet treating the nineteenth century in the same manner, and he will be penetrated by a sense of the gigantic nature of the attempt, success in which could only be possible to an intense realist capable of making his phantoms as substantial as when they walked the earth. Yet this is only one side of Dante's mighty task, which was not only to render the unseen world visible and almost palpable, but to embody what he fondly believed to be a system of infallible dog-

matic truth. It need hardly be said that it is to the consummate execution of the former part of his mission that he is chiefly indebted for his fame with the world at large. The *Inferno*, where description and portraiture predominate, has impressed the imagination of mankind far more powerfully than the more mystical and doctrinal *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*.

This is not the judgment of the most refined readers. "The acutest critics," says Shelley, "have justly reversed the judgment of the vulgar, and the order of the great acts of the *Divina Commedia* is the measure of the admiration which they accord to Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise." "The whole *Purgatorio*," says Symonds, "is a monument to the beauty and tranquillity of Dante's soul. The whole *Paradiso* is a proof of its purity and radiance and celestial love." This is true, and yet it is indisputable that in thinking of Dante the *Inferno* always comes first to the mind, and that this portion of his poem, had one part only been published, would have done far more to preserve his name than either of the others in the like case, and this although it is far more tainted than they are with his most characteristic and least pardonable faults. The chief causes, no doubt, are that the material sublime is always more impressive to the mass of men than the moral; that there is an element of risk and adventure in the poet's journey among the shades absent from the other two parts; and that Virgil is a more tangible and human personage than Beatrice. Yet it must also be admitted that the diviner beauty of the two latter parts suffers from an admixture of theological and philosophical disquisition, not the less tedious because it was impossible for the poet to avoid it. Milton tells us

that the fallen spirits reasoned "of fate, freewill, foreknowledge absolute," but judiciously avoids reporting their observations.

Dante's place in comparison with the other chief poets of the world is difficult to determine, for none but he has written an apocalypse. He is emphatically the Seer among them, the "Soothsayer" in the original sense of the term, the most independent of poetical fiction and convention. He is also by far the most individual and autobiographic, and the only one who is the hero of his own poem. Milton, who is most naturally paralleled with him, does not deliver a revelation, but records a history. This at once places Dante in a higher category than Milton as an elementary force, and when we consider the circumstances of their respective ages it seems impossible to deny that Dante was by far the more wonderful man. This does not necessarily establish the superiority of the *Divina Commedia* to *Paradise Lost*. Isaiah presents himself in a more august and venerable character than Homer, but his prophecy is not as majestic as the *Iliad*. It is also difficult, when assigning the relative ranks of poets, to discriminate strictly between the claims that arise from mere poetical endowment and the significance of their position in history. One may stand upon the higher pedestal, and the other may have the sweeter voice.

In one point of view, Dante's figure is the most imposing of any poet's; for, intensely local as he is, he yet interprets all mediæval Europe. When, however, he is compared with his closest analogue, Milton, simply as a poet, it is not so clear that the comparison is to his advantage. The great characteristics which chiefly discriminate him from all other poets are an

ineffable purity, such as we see in the early Italian painters, and an intensity of minute description which surpasses the similar performances of others, except, England may say with pride, Robert Browning's, as the work of the etching tool surpasses the work of the pen. These gifts are best displayed upon a small scale, and hence Dante's cabinet pieces are more successful than his vast pictures. They depend, too, in the last resort upon the poet's own fidelity of observation, and hence his best delineations retrace what he has actually seen. His general description of the *Inferno* is more impressive from its unflinching realism than from its imaginative sublimity. There is no grandeur in his picture of Lucifer, though much quaint ingenuity. Milton's "not less than archangel ruined" tells us more and affects us more profoundly than all Dante's elaborate word-painting. If Milton has nothing so beautiful as the exquisite comparison of Beatrice to a bird awaiting the dawn that she may gather food for her young, neither has Dante anything so sublime as Milton's comparison of the flying fiend to a fleet discerned afar off as hanging in the clouds, or of Satan equipped for battle to the comet "that fires the length of Ophiuchus huge." The magnificent lines in which Tennyson has celebrated the might and music of Milton would seem inappropriate to Dante. In an age when minute description is in fashion, Dante's virtuoso-like skill in graphic delineation has been favourable to his renown; but a reaction must ensue when a bolder and ampler style of handling is again appreciated at its worth.

If, however, Dante is on the whole inferior to Milton in poetry pure and simple, he is more important as a

representative of a great era of mankind. In him the Middle Age lives as it does in its cathedrals; and when the cathedrals have crumbled, the *Divine Comedy* will be as fresh as it is now. Nor is this significance merely historical or antiquarian. From the very first it was appreciated by contemporaries. Repentant Florence endowed lectures upon the *Divine Comedy*, and Boccaccio was the first lecturer. In the next century Frezzi tries to transpose it into another key; and Attavanti cites from the pulpit *Dantes ille noster* as copiously and reverentially as any of the Fathers. Even in the age of the Renaissance, Pius the Fourth's cardinals cap quotations from Dante as the last notes of Palestrina's Mass of Pope Marcellus die down the aisles of St. Peter's. If he afterwards fell into comparative abeyance for a time, it must be remembered that Italy lay prostrate in the seventeenth century, and that his genius did not agree well with the especial mission assigned to her in the eighteenth.

There can be no surer proof of Dante's eternal reality than that the revival of his fame coincided with the manifestation of ideas apparently the reverse of his own. The French Revolution brought the mediæval poet into fashion; and although his best exposition, where it is upon the whole most profitable to study, has been by those so nearly at his own intellectual standpoint as Dean Church and Maria Rossetti, his most eloquent champions have been those who, on a superficial view, might seem to have least in common with him—Lamennais, Shelley, Carlyle, Symonds, Mazzini, Longfellow. The feelings of the man of the nineteenth century, stirred by the divine and eternal elements in Dante, with a vehemence proportioned to his repulsion to the time

sient and accidental, are thus powerfully expressed by the greatest of living Italian poets :

> "*Dante, how is it that my vows I bear,*
> *Submitted at thy shrine to bend and pray,*
> *To Night alone relinquishing thy lay,*
> *And with returning sun returning there?*
> *Never for me hath Lucy breathed a prayer,*
> *Matilde with lustral fount washed sin away,*
> *Or Beatrice on celestial way*
> *Led up her mortal love by starry stair.*
> *Thy Holy Empire I abhor, the head*
> *Of thy great Frederick in Olona's vale*
> *Most joyfully had cloven, crown and brains.*
> *Empire and Church in crumbling ruin fail:*
> *Above, thy ringing song from heaven is sped:*
> *The Gods depart, the poet's hymn remains.*"
>
> —CARDUCCI.

CHAPTER V

PETRARCH AS MAN OF LETTERS

ALTHOUGH, hardly less than Shakespeare, born not for an age but for all time, Dante was nevertheless in an especial sense the poet of the mediæval period. The vast advance which he effected in the poetic art had no counterpart in a corresponding progress in the world of intellect. Powerful as his mind was, it seemed as an organ of thought rather architectural than creative; more intent on combining the materials it found into the most august edifice which their constitution admitted, than on gaining new channels for feeling and intelligence. This was to be the work of a mind far less original than Dante's, but happily placed at the confluence of mediæval ideas with an element by which they were destined to be submerged and transformed. In the year 1304, on the very day when Dante and his exiled companions were making their desperate attempt to fight their way back into Florence, FRANCESCO PETRARCA, the child of one of their number, was born a humanist by the grace of God in the Tuscan town of Arezzo. Six years after Dante's death a casual encounter with a lady who awoke the faculty of song within him made the scholar the first poet of his age. But neither the innate love of letters nor the awakened faculty of poetry would have exalted Petrarch to the literary supremacy

he attained if he had not lived at the very juncture when literature, hitherto cultivated in some of its branches for mere utility, in others as an ornament of courtly life, was beginning to revive as a profession. Dante, a statesman, a philosopher, a prophet, was not in a true sense a man of letters, and neither his ideals nor his contemporary influence extended beyond the limits of Italy. Petrarch was the first modern literary dictator, the first author to receive the unanimous homage of a world of culture. Such a world had not existed since the decay of antique civilisation, and he may be said to have been in a manner both its cause and its effect. As the Erasmus, the Voltaire, the Goethe of his age, he claims a more distinguished place in literary history than even his exquisite poetry, much less his but relatively ample erudition, could have secured for him.

Seven months after Petrarch's birth his mother was allowed to return to her patrimonial estate near Florence, where she was sometimes secretly visited by her husband. The elder Petrarca (or, as the name was then spelt, Petracco) might have returned to his native city on the same dishonourable terms as those offered to Dante, but, like Dante, spurned them. Despairing of repatriation, he betook himself to Avignon, then the seat of the Papal Court, where he followed the profession of the law.

Petrarch was successively educated at Carpentras, at Montpellier, and at the University of Bologna, where his father's commands compelled him to the study of jurisprudence. The death of his parent in 1326 recalled him to Avignon, and restored him to letters. To qualify himself for ecclesiastical preferment he received the tonsure without taking orders, a step not unusual in

those days, and devoted himself entirely to literature. The "Babylonish captivity" of the Church at Avignon, violently as he denounces it in his writings, was highly favourable to his interests, for it helped him to the patronage of Cardinal Colonna, whose brother, afterwards Bishop of Lombès, he had known intimately at the University of Bologna. It was probably from this source that he derived means to mingle with gay society and indulge in the fashionable follies of eccentric costume, which he ridicules in his later writings; for letters as yet afforded him no sure subsistence, and his scanty patrimony had been embezzled or wasted by his guardians. On April 6, 1327,[1] occurred the most momentous event of his life, his vision of Laura in church "at the hour of prime," which made him a poet. But for this, he might never have written in the vernacular. Cicero and Virgil, his literary idols, enjoined Latin composition, to which in all probability he would have exclusively addicted himself but for the need of celebrating Laura in a language which she understood.

The question of Laura's identity will be best considered along with the poems devoted to her praise and her adorer's passion. Neither love nor society, meanwhile, kept Petrarch from letters, and his reputation waxed daily. He displayed a happy faculty for maintaining relations with the great, equally honourable to both parties, exempt alike from presumption and servility. In 1330 he spent a considerable time with Bishop Colonna at his Pyrenean diocese of Lombès, and on his return was formally enrolled as a member

[1] Petrarch says on a Good Friday, but Good Friday did not fall on April 6 in 1327, and the statement of the encounter having taken place in church at all is inconsistent with other passages in his writings.

of the Cardinal's household. His residence at Avignon made him known to the learned English prelate, Richard de Bury, and other distinguished visitors at the Papal Court, and he began to enjoy the favour of Robert, King of Naples. His vernacular poetry, though far inferior to that which he was destined to produce, was nevertheless making him and Laura famous, for he exclaims in an early sonnet :

> "*Blest all songs and music that have spread*
> *Her laud afar.*"

In 1333 he made a journey to Paris, Belgium, and the Rhine, of which he has given us a lively account in his correspondence, and which produced at least one sonnet which showed that by this time he wanted but little of perfection :

> "*Through wild inhospitable woods I rove*
> *Where fear attends even on the soldier's way,*
> *Dreadless of ill; for nought can me affray*
> *Saving that Sun which shines by light of Love :*
> *And chant, as idly carolling I move,*
> *Her, whom not Heaven itself can keep away,*
> *Borne in my eyes; and ladies I survey*
> *Encircling her, who oaks and beeches prove.*
> *Her voice in sighing breeze and rustling bough*
> *And leaf I seem to hear, and birds, and rills*
> *Murmuring the while they slip through grassy green.*
> *Rarely have silences and lonely thrills*
> *Of overshadowing forests pleased as now,*
> *Except for my own Sun too little seen.*"

In the same year Petrarch graduated as a patriotic poet by composing his fine Latin metrical epistle on the woes of Italy. In 1335 he received from the Pope a canonry in the cathedral of his patron the Bishop of

Lombès. In 1336 he achieved his celebrated ascent of Mount Ventoux, which marks an era as the inauguration of mountain-climbing for pleasure's sake. In 1336 and 1337 he undertook his first journey to Rome, which he found in a most lamentable condition from rapine and civil war. Attributing this to the absence of the Popes in France, he began his long series of exhortations to them to return, to which, being throughout his lifetime Frenchmen, they naturally turned deaf ears. Hence in a measure the disgust with Avignon which led him to seclude himself more and more in Vaucluse (*shut valley*), the picturesque retreat on the Sorga whither he betook himself in 1337, a beautiful description of which by Ugo Foscolo may be read in Reeve's biography. His adoration of Laura had not prevented his contracting less spiritual ties, for two children were born to him about this time.

Petrarch's rural leisure was largely employed in the composition of a Latin history of Rome, which can have had no critical value, but would have been deeply interesting as exhibiting the classical feeling of the representative of the early Renaissance. He ultimately destroyed it, and turned to the composition of his Latin epic on the Punic war, *Africa*, for and from which he long expected immortality. His detestation of the Papal Court breaks out about this time in some powerful sonnets. His Italian poems, meanwhile, had made their way with the world to a degree surprising in an age unacquainted with printing. In 1340 he received on the same day the offer of the poetic laurel from the cities of Paris and Rome. Deciding for the latter, he embarked at Marseilles in February 1341, voyaged to Naples, received signal marks of favour from the King, and,

repairing to Rome, was invested with the laurel by the Senator of the city, April 8, 1341. From this day the history of modern literature as a recognised power may be said to date. Ere his return at the beginning of 1342, he had finished his *Africa*, and bought a house at Parma to give himself a footing in his native land.

In 1343 Petrarch was again in Italy, discharging an important diplomatic mission with which he had been entrusted by the new Pope Clement VI. to the Court of Naples; the state of which he describes in dark colours, not too dark, as the history of the hapless Queen Joanna, Robert's successor, sufficiently proves. He nevertheless rendered himself acceptable to her, and, his mission honourably discharged, repaired to Parma, where (1344) he wrote the first of his great political odes, *Italia mia benche il parlar sia indarno*, and whence he was chased by civil discord. He did not, however, return to Avignon until towards the end of this year. The next few years were chiefly spent in literary occupations, the most remarkable of which was the composition (1347) of his ode to the Tribune Cola di Rienzi, in whom he saw the deliverer of his country. Petrarch's course was not free from the imputation of ingratitude to his old friends and patrons, the Colonna family; yet it would have been worse to have been silent at the prospect, however brief and delusive, of the resurrection of Rome. Other poets before him had written on Italian politics, but none, not even Dante, had so exalted their theme by eloquence and ennobling largeness of view:

> "*Her ancient walls, which still with fear and love*
> *The world admires, whene'er it calls to mind*
> *The days of Eld, and turns to look behind;*
> *Her hoar and caverned monuments above*

The dust of men whose fame, until the world
In dissolution sink, can never fail;
Her all, that in one ruin now lies hurled,
Hopes to have healed by thee its every ail.
O faithful Brutus! noble Scipios dead!
To you what triumph, where ye now are blest,
If of our worthy choice the fame have spread!
And how his laurelled crest
Will old Fabricius rear, with joy elate
That his own Rome again shall beauteous be and great!"

—MACGREGOR.

The next year, 1348, was one of havoc and desolation for Europe, through the ravages of the Black Death, which swept away a larger proportion of her inhabitants than any similar visitation recorded in history. Laura was among the victims, dying on April 6, the anniversary of her meeting with Petrarch. Cardinal Colonna, his chief patron since the death of the Bishop of Lombès, was also carried off on July 3. Nothing can be added to his own words:

"*The lofty Column and the Laurel green,*
Whose shade was shelter for my weary thought,
Are broken; mine no longer that which sought
North, south and east and west shall not be seen.
Ravished by Death the treasures twain have been
Whereby I wended with glad courage fraught,
By land or lordship ne'er to be rebought,
Or golden heap or gem of Orient sheen.
If this the high arbitrament of Fate,
What else remains for me than visage bent,
And eye embathed and spirit desolate?
O life of man, in prospect excellent!
What scarce slow striving years accumulate
So lightly in a morning to be spent!"

Petrarch's demeanour after the death of his Laura presents a strong contrast to Dante's after the like

bereavement, nor does he suffer by the comparison. Nothing can surpass the poignancy of Dante's first grief as depicted in the *Vita Nuova;* but he soon forms another tie, and though the memory of Beatrice is ever with him, the human affection sublimates more and more into an abstract spiritual type. Petrarch's utterances, on the other hand, wear at first something of a conventional semblance, but constantly increase in depth and tenderness, and while he remains the humanist in his studies and the diplomatist in active life, his poetry, as of old, is all but monopolised by his one passion. As his attachment to Laura in her life had been compatible with frequent and long absences, so her death did not prevent him from discharging the public functions fitly entrusted to the most eminent scholar of his age.

Although he often expresses in his verse his delight in revisiting the banks of the Sorga, his life from this time was chiefly spent in Upper Italy, much occupied by the discharge of diplomatic commissions from the Pope, the Venetian Republic, and the Lords of Milan and Padua; constantly appealing to the Avignon Popes to terminate the "Babylonish captivity" of the Church; vexed by the undutifulness of his natural son, but finding comfort in his daughter; indefatigable in collecting and transcribing manuscripts; giving, though himself ignorant of Greek, a powerful impulse to Hellenic studies by commissioning a Latin translation of Homer; producing many of his most pleasing minor Latin writings; and throwing his last energies into the apotheosis of Laura in his *Trionfi.* He went to Paris to congratulate John, King of France, on his release from captivity in England; and was present at the marriage of Lionel, Duke of Clarence, at Milan, where or soon afterwards

he may possibly have encountered Chaucer. Boccaccio followed him with respectful homage, and almost his last literary labour was the Latin translation of the Florentine's tale of *Patient Griselda*. The last four years of his life, though with many intervals of public business, were chiefly spent in his retirement at Arquá, a village in the Euganean Hills, where death overtook him as he bent over a book, July 20, 1374. He had virtually finished the *Trionfi* about three months previously.

We have devoted more space to the biography of Petrarch than to that of Dante, because, although Dante towers above him as a poet, Petrarch is the more important figure in Italian literary history. Dante stands alone: venerated as he was by his countrymen, and not wholly destitute of imitators, he yet founded no school, and his influence on the development of the Italian intellect is slight in comparison with Petrarch's. Together with the great schoolman who quitted the world as he entered it, he sums up the Middle Age, which in him and Aquinas attains its highest development. Petrarch, on the other hand, is the representative Italian. He does not, like Dante, deliver, but is himself a prophecy: the future of Italian culture is prefigured in him. He was also the first to bestow on Italy an unquestioned supremacy in the world of literature, and was the earliest restorer of the republic of letters, a conception extinct in the ages of barbarism. In this restoration, transcending the limits of his own country, his Latin writings were necessarily more influential than his Italian,[1] and although they do not properly belong to

[1] "It is pleasing," says Coleridge, in a note to his little-known *Maximian*, "to contemplate in this illustrious man at once the benefactor of his own times

our subject, their great importance in the history of culture entitles them to a few words.

The chief causes of Petrarch's failure as a Latin poet are evident. In the infancy of vernacular literature it was not sufficiently understood that compositions in a dead language, however exquisite, must fail to bestow immortality. Nor could Petrarch himself be fully aware how impossible it was to write like a Roman poet in the new dawn of reviving classical studies. It took two centuries of culture to produce a Vida and a Sannazaro, and if their names are undying, the same can hardly be said of their Latin works. But there was a deeper reason. Petrarch attempted epic composition without epic inspiration. His genius was entirely lyric, and his poetry has little value except where it palpitates with lyrical feeling. When he writes on the misfortunes of his country, he is a poet even when writing in Latin; and his great Latin epic, the *Africa*, too often tame, notwithstanding its true natural feeling, sometimes, especially when near the end of the poem he speaks of himself, kindles into poetry. The Latin verses placed by Coleridge on the half-title of his own love-poems in *Sibylline Leaves* are almost as exquisite as the tenderest passages of the *Canzoniere* itself:[1]

> "*Quas humilis tenero stylus olim effudit in ævo,*
> *Perlegis hic lacrymas, et quod pharetratus acuta*
> *Ille puer puero fecit mihi cuspide vulnus.*

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and the delight of the succeeding, and working on his contemporaries by that portion of his works which is least in account with posterity."

[1] From the epistle to Barbatus, Coleridge says of the entire composition: "Had Petrarch lived a century later, and, retaining all his *substantiality* of head and heart, added to it the elegancies and manly politure of Fracastorius, Flaminius, Vida, and their co-rivals, this letter would have been a classical gem" (*Anima Poetæ*, p. 263).

Omnia paulatim consumit longior ætas,
Vivendoque simul morimur, rapimurque manendo.
Ipse mihi collatus enim non ille videbor:
Frons alia est, moresque alii, nova mentis imago,
Voxque aliud sonat.
Pectore nunc gelido calidos miseremur amantes,
Jamque arsisse pudet. Veteres tranquilla tumultus
Mens horret, relegensque alium putat ista locutum."

Although Petrarch preferred Latin to Italian in the abstract, and even affected to undervalue Dante because his chief works were composed in the vulgar tongue, he acknowledged that he had missed the perfection in Latin which he was conscious of having attained in Italian. His only prose-writings with any significance for us now are the autobiographic. Some of his ethical disquisitions, however, if they had come down from classic times, would have been regarded as precious monuments of antiquity. The most important of these is the *De Remediis utriusque Fortunæ* (1356), in two books, the first treating of the snares of prosperity, the second arming the soul against adversity. The reflections are forcibly expressed, but in themselves somewhat trite. His tract *De sua et aliorum Ignorantia* (1361), on the other hand, abounds with energy, and gives a lively picture of the strife in his bosom between the humanistic scholar and the orthodox Christian. More vital still, at least after some pedantic digressions have been discarded, is his *Secretum, sive de Contemptu Mundi* (1342), where the conflict in his mind between the sense of moral obligation and his passion for Laura is so depicted as to render him the prototype of Rousseau, and entitle us to derive one of the most characteristic departments of modern literature from him. He is no less the father of modern autobiography by the slight but charming sketch he has left of himself in his

Epistola ad Posteros, prefixed to the general collection of his letters. It was a great discovery that the external circumstances of a remarkable life are not the only ones worth relating.

The most important of all Petrarch's Latin works is his collection of Epistles, partly formed by himself in his lifetime, and greatly enriched by the diligence of recent editors, especially Fracassetti. These are not only of high interest from the portrait they convey of the man himself, equally as an individual and as the ideal type of the man of letters, but form a perpetual commentary on the manners and customs of his age. Many, though composed by Petrarch, are written in the names of sovereigns or public bodies; others are letters of warm encouragement or warmer remonstrance to popes, emperors, and others who then seemed, but only seemed, to have the world's destinies in their hands. In all his correspondence with the great, Petrarch, like Dante, appears as the idealist, inspired by the remembrance of antiquity, and urging upon the rulers of the day a more exalted course of action than suited their dispositions, or, it must be admitted, was compatible with the circumstances of the time. They on their parts seem to have appreciated the honour of being lectured by such a man, and to have permitted him to say what he pleased, satisfied that he could exert no practical influence upon the course of politics. Printing and the liberty of the press have now made the humblest newspaper scribe more potent than the first man of letters of the fourteenth century. Some of Petrarch's epistles are of unique interest, such as the description of his ascent of Mount Ventoux, of the great tempest at Naples, and of the apparition of the ghost of the Bishop of Lombès, the

first circumstantial narrative of the kind, and perhaps to this day the best authenticated.

Petrarch's encouragement of classical study is not the least among his titles to fame. He was the Erasmus of his age in so far as the rudimentary condition of criticism allowed, and, in so far as his means permitted, its Mæcenas. He discovered Cicero's epistles to Atticus, and, by his own statement, which there seems no sufficient reason for rejecting, had at one time the lost treatise *De Gloria* in his hands. He yearned towards Homer and Plato, whom he could not read in the original, but perused in translations. The fullest information respecting his literary tastes, the extent of his library and his knowledge of the classics, his borrowings and loans of manuscripts, his copyists and his bindings, will be found in the excellent monograph of Pierre de Nolhac, *Pétrarque et l'Humanisme* (Paris, 1892). Many manuscripts known to have belonged to him still exist, chiefly in French public libraries. The story of the destruction of his books by the neglect of the Venetians is groundless; they ought to have been made over to the Republic after his death, but they never reached Venice. The Aldine Italic type is said to have been modelled after Petrarch's handwriting, and the first book in which it was used was an edition of the author whom he principally annotated, Virgil.

CHAPTER VI

PETRARCH AND LAURA

PETRARCH'S activity as a scholar claimed so much larger a portion of his time and thoughts than his *Canzoniere*, and the bulk of the latter, considerable as it is, is so small in comparison with that of the mass of his writings, that Symonds seems almost justified in depreciating his work as an Italian lyrist in comparison with his influence as a humanist. Yet Petrarch's Latin works were like the falling rain, which passes away as a distinct existence, though long invisibly operative as a fertilising agent; while his poetry, confined to a definite channel by the restraints of consummate diction and style, flows in a crystal stream for ever. Here and there in other men's books, no doubt, an isolated love-strain of higher quality may be found, but nothing approaching the *Canzoniere* as an epitomised encyclopædia of passion. The best is transcendently excellent; and if many of the pieces, especially near the beginning, might well have been dispensed with as far as their individual desert is concerned, they still have their value as notes in a great harmony. As his translator Cayley well remarks, "No poet has so fully represented the whole world of love in every tone and variety of play and earnest, delight and pain,

enthusiasm and self-reproach, expostulation, rebellion, submission, adoration, and friendship, or regret and religious consolations leading gradually to another sphere of hope and devotion." One thing only is wanting to this encyclopædia of emotion, the rapture of possession. This was not for Petrarch: throughout the first part he is the yearning suitor, throughout the second the dejected mourner. Hardly another man ever sighed or wept with so much constancy or so little recompense.

Who was the object of this unique passion and perpetual grief? So obscure are the circumstances that some have deemed Laura, like the candlemaker's widow at Père la Chaise, "une métaphore, un symbole." Petrarch's friend, the Bishop of Lombès, suspected as much, but Petrarch indignantly protested, and after a while refuted the surmise by a manuscript note in his Virgil, to be treated more fully hereafter. Apart from this, it seems strange that scepticism should have survived his avowal, on a serious occasion, the composition of his address to posterity; where he speaks of his affection for Laura as his sole incitement to worthy fame, and of her own reputation as something entirely independent of his praises. "What little I am, such as it is, I am through her; and if I have attained to any fame or glory, I had never possessed it if the few grains of virtue which Nature had deposited in my soul had not been cultivated by her with such noble affection. What else did I desire in my youth than to please her, and her alone, who alone had pleased me?" The strongest testimony, however, is that of the poems themselves, which are full of traits and descriptions evidently derived from real life, and which would lose

all their charm if they could be deemed imaginary. Take this for example:

> "*As Love pursued me in the wonted glade,*
> *Wary as he, who weening foe to find,*
> *Guards every pass, and looks before, behind,*
> *I stood in mail of ancient thought arrayed:*
> *When, sideways turned, I saw by sudden shade*
> *The sun impeded, and, on earth outlined*
> *Her shape, who, if aright conceives my mind,*
> *Meetest for immortality was made.*
> *I said unto my heart, 'Why dost thou fear?'*
> *But ere my heart could open to my thought,*
> *The beams whereby I melt shone all around;*
> *And, as when flash by thunder-peal is caught,*
> *My eyes encounter of those eyes most dear*
> *And smiling welcome simultaneous found.*"

How natural and pleasing if the incident be real! and how marvellous the poetical power which can raise such an edifice out of such a trifle! On the other hand, how insipid if the little event, instead of a ripple on the surface of life arrested by the poet's art ere it has had time to pass into nothingness, be but a fiction to enable him to say a pretty thing! The author of so frigid a contrivance could never have been the author of the *Canzoniere.*

But though Laura's actual existence is certain, her identity is a subject of everlasting controversy. The popular belief near to Petrarch's own day is expressed by an anonymous biographer, who, writing, as is thought, near the end of the fourteenth century, calls her Loretta, and, by adding that the Pope offered Petrarch a dispensation from his ecclesiastical vows in order to marry her, clearly indicates that she was believed to be a single woman. The Abbé de Sade, however, in his life of

Petrarch, published in 1767, adduces much documentary and other evidence to identify her with Laura, born De Noves, wife of Hugo de Sade, and an ancestress of the Abbé's own. With one important exception, to be mentioned shortly, the Abbé's proofs are of little weight; they establish the existence of a Laura de Sade, but by no means that she was Petrarch's Laura. An account of the discovery of Laura de Sade's tomb in 1533, authenticated by some very bad verses attributed to Petrarch found within it, although itself genuine, evidently records a clumsy fabrication.

One advantage the Abbé's theory certainly has, the production of an unanswerable reason why Petrarch did not marry Laura; but, on the other hand, his ecclesiastical orders might be a sufficient impediment. The Papal dispensation which might have relieved him of them must surely have relieved him of his preferments also; and if the story is authentic, the offer came in all probability from Clement VI., the Pope by whom he was chiefly favoured, who did not attain the tiara until 1342, fifteen years after his first acquaintance with Laura, when Laura's health seems to have been much impaired, and he may well have thought the time gone by. The objections to his suit having been addressed to a married woman seem almost insurmountable. If his flame was Laura de Sade, she was the mother of a very numerous family, and it appears all but incredible that he should have inscribed so much verse to her both in her lifetime and after her death, and discussed his passion so freely in his Dialogue without the slightest allusion to husband or children; or that the identity of a lady holding so high a position, and celebrated in verses read all over Italy, should so long

have remained obscure; or that he should have enjoyed such freedom of access to her as he evidently did. The idea, moreover, seems quite inconsistent with the tenor of the celebrated sonnet, *Tranquillo porto avea mostrato Amore:*

> "*Love had at length a tranquil port displayed*
> *To travailed soul, long vexed by toil and teen,*
> *In calm maturity, where naked seen*
> *Is Vice, and Virtue in fair garb arrayed.*
> *Bare to her eyes my heart should now be laid,*
> *Disquieted no more their peace serene—*
> *O Death! what harvest of long years hath been*
> *Ruin by thee in one brief moment made!*
> *The hour when unreproved I might invoke*
> *Her chaste ear's favour, and disburden there*
> *My breast of fond and ancient thought, drew nigh:*
> *And she, perchance, considering as I spoke*
> *Each bloomless face and either's silvered hair,*
> *Some blessed word had uttered with a sigh.*"

The thought manifestly is, that if Laura had lived a short time longer their intimacy would have given no occasion for scandal. This might be true of an unmarried lady or a widow, hardly of a wife. The sonnet also proves that Petrarch and Laura were nearly of an age, refuting Vellutello's opinion on this point. Salvatore Betti, moreover, has found another Laura, fulfilling, in his estimation, all requisites as well as the Abbé de Sade's.

It must, notwithstanding, be acknowledged that there is one piece of documentary evidence almost sufficient to prove the Abbé's theory in the teeth of all objections, could we but be certain of its genuineness. This is the will of Laura de Sade, made in a condition of extreme sickness on April 3, 1348. We know on Petrarch's own authority that his Laura died on April 6, for the genuineness of the note in his Virgil where he records this fact

is now regarded as incontestable. That two ladies of the name of Laura were dying at or near Avignon at the same time is clearly improbable. But is the will itself authentic? or may it not have been altered or interpolated? The Abbé cites it as a document in his family archives; its existence is attested by several persons in the eighteenth century; but it does not appear to have been submitted to the scrutiny of any expert, nor can we learn whether such an examination has ever been made since, or whether the testament is now producible.[1] Should its authenticity ever be demonstrated, but hardly otherwise, we shall be almost compelled to embrace a belief liable in every other point of view to formidable objections.

Although Laura, as depicted by Petrarch, is the most ethereal feminine ideal ever conceived, his passion was certainly not of the Platonic kind. The contrary has been asserted, but is contradicted by every page of the *Canzoniere*, which is full of reproaches to Laura for her cruelty, incomprehensible if she was not withholding very substantial favours. He certainly did not want for encouragements of a more spiritual nature:

"*The mist of pallor in such beauteous wise*
The sweetness of her smile did overscreen,
That my thrilled heart, upon my visage seen,
Sprang to encounter it in swift surprise.
How soul by soul is scanned in Paradise
Then knew I, unto whom disclosed had been
That thought pathetic by all gaze unseen
Save mine, who solely for such sight have eyes.

[1] Koerting distinctly affirms that it is not. The history of Carlyle and the Squire Papers evinces the extreme danger of touching, tasting, or handling in similar cases.

All look angelical, all tender gest
That e'er on man by grace of woman beamed
At side of this had shown discourtesy.
The gentle visage, modestly depressed
Earthward, inquired with silence, as meseemed,
'Who draws my faithful friend away from me?'"

Long after this, which surely should have satisfied a Platonic lover, he is looking forward to a more perfect consummation of his wishes:

"*Love sends me messengers of gentle thought,*
Since days of yore our trusty go-between,
And comforts me, who ne'er, he saith, have been
So near as now to hope's fruition brought."

What hope's fruition was we learn from numerous sonnets composed after the death of Laura, in which the poet expresses his thankfulness that his mistress did not yield to his too ardent entreaties, but kept him in order by her frowns, a function attributed to her even in the first book of sonnets:

"*O happy arts of excellent effect!*
I labouring with the tongue, she with the glance,
Have glory there, and virtue here bestowed."

Laura's attitude towards Petrarch seems not ill expressed in the sonnet composed in the eighteenth century by Ippolito Pindemonte:

"*To thee, immortal lady lowly laid*
Where Sorga glassed thy loveliness divine,
I bow in worship; not because was thine
The beauty solely for the coffin made;
But for the soul that animating swayed,
And, cold and colder growing, did incline
Brighter and brighter yet to soar and shine
Thy lover's flame of passion unallayed.

For certes his lament had seemed misplaced,
And much the pathos of his music marred,
Had not his lady been so very chaste:
Come, grateful Italy, with fond regard,
To kiss the tomb by such a tenant graced,
And bless the dust that gave thee such a bard."

This peculiar relation of Laura to Petrarch as a monitress, no less than an object of adoration, goes far to establish the reality of his passion, which is exactly that which men frequently entertain for women a little older than themselves, and whom they deem in some measure or some respect their superiors. He feels himself ennobled by his love, a sentiment expressed with great force in the tenth sonnet, one of the earliest, and in many others, especially the beautiful Sonnet clii.:

"*Soul, that such various things with various art*
Dost hearken, read, discourse, conceive and write;
Fond eyes, and thou, keen sense framed exquisite
To bear her holy message to the heart:
Rejoice ye that it hath not been your part
To gain the road so hard to keep aright
Too late or soon for beacon of her light,
Or guidance her imprinted steps impart.
Now with such beam and such direction blest
'Twere shameful in brief way to miss the sign
Pointing the passage to eternal rest.
Upward, faint soul, thy heavenward path incline;
Through clouds of her sweet wrath pursue thy quest,
Following the seemly step and ray divine."

We do not know whether Petrarch had written any poetry before he tuned his lyre to hymn Laura. His beginnings (the exquisite initial sonnet being in fact the last written of any) are at first feeble and uncertain. It

is not until arriving at Sonnet xxii. that he strikes a note worthy of his mature power, and he continues unequal up to about Sonnet lx., when masterpieces begin to occur with frequency; from this point onwards the proportion of absolutely insignificant poems is comparatively small. The interspersed sestines and ballate add little to his reputation; not so the canzoni, which are among his noblest productions. Traces of a chronological arrangement are evident; thus his secession to the Sorga gives birth to a group of sonnets with which those denouncing the Papal Court at Avignon are intimately connected; and in general the poems show a continuous development of style, but there are some signal exceptions. Towards the end of the first book his Muse would seem in danger of flagging, were she not stimulated by forebodings of the death of Laura. The pieces expressing this apprehension form a well-marked group, which may be associated with the doubts and fears which, after Laura's decease, he tells us beset him on his last parting with her (1347):

> "*The lovely eyes, now in supernal sphere*
> *Bright with the light whence life and safety rain,*
> *Leaving mine mendicant and mourning here,*
> *Flashed with new mood they seemed to entertain,*
> *Saying to these: Take comfort, friends most dear,*
> *Not here but elsewhere shall we meet again.*"

Mestica, the most critical of Petrarch's editors, seems to think that he wrote no more on Laura in her lifetime after the great spiritual change which he supposes him to have undergone in 1343, when he wrote his dialogue with St. Augustine. We see but slight evidence of any such metamorphosis.

The second book of the *Canzoniere*, comprising the pieces composed after the death of Laura, resembles the first in their comparative inferiority at the beginning, after a fine introductory sonnet. Either Petrarch's grief had paralysed his powers, or he had not fully realised his loss, or he had not yet hit upon the fitting tone. In a short time, however, he regains his true self, and the second part is generally deemed to excel the first, as pathos excels passion. It is not that the artist is more consummate, but the capabilities of his instrument are greater. The poems generally fall into two groups—laments for Laura's loss, or consolation derived from the realisation of her presence on earth or in heaven. An example of each must be given:

"*The eyes whose praise I penned with glowing thought,*
And countenance and limbs and all fair worth
That sundered me from men of mortal birth,
From them dissevered, in myself distraught;
The clustering locks with golden glory fraught;
The sudden-shining smile, as angels' mirth,
Wonted to make a paradise on earth;
Are now a little dust, that feels not aught.
Still have I life, who rail and rage at it,
Lorn of Love's light that solely life endears;
Mastless before the hurricane I flit.
Be this my last of lays to mortal ears;
Dried is the ancient fountain of my wit,
And all my music melted into tears."

"*Exalted by my thought to regions where*
I found whom earthly quest hath never shown,
Where Love hath rule 'twixt fourth and second sone;
More beautiful I found her, less austere.
Clasping my hand, she said, 'Behold the sphere
Where we shall dwell, if With hath truly known
I am, who wrung from thee such bitter moan;
Whose sun went down ere evening did appear.

My bliss, too high for man to understand,
Yet needs thee, and the veil that so did please,
Now unto dust for briefest season given.'
Why ceased she speaking? why withdrew her hand?
For, rapt to ecstasy by words like these,
Little I wanted to have stayed in Heaven."

This latter mood is in general the more characteristic of Petrarch. Towards the end it prevails more and more, but the same falling-off is observable as in the former book. Petrarch's religious sonnets are exquisite when they involve a direct vision of Laura, but otherwise they are apt to become tame and conventional. It is almost a pity that the most notable exception should ever have been written, though it ranks among his masterpieces:

"*Ever do I lament the days gone by,*
When adoration of a mortal thing
Bound me to earth, though gifted with a wing
That haply had upraised me to the sky.
Thou, unto whom unveiled my errors lie,
Celestial, unbeheld, eternal King,
Help to the frail and straying spirit bring,
And lack of grace with grace of Thine supply.
So shall the life in storm and warfare spent
In peaceful haven close; if here in vain
Her tarrying, seemly her departure be.
Aid me to live the little life yet lent;
Expiring strength with Thy strong arm sustain:
Thou knowest I have hope in none but Thee."

Were this more than a passing mood, it would be painful indeed that Petrarch should have lived to deem his devotion to Laura misspent, and nothing short of ludicrous that he should have accused himself of missing by his *Canzoniere* the renown which epics or tragedies might have ensured him. Such a passing mood it must

have been, for it is contradicted by the succeeding pieces. The book concludes with an impassioned hymn to the Virgin, which may have suggested to Goethe the analogous conclusion of *Faust*.

The *Canzoniere* is completed by the *Trionfi*, allegorical shows entirely in the taste of the Middle Ages, which we shall find repeated in Francesco Colonna's *Polifilo*. Petrarch successively sings the might of Love, Chastity, Death, Fame, Time, and Eternity, set forth in the long processions of their captives or votaries. A certain circumscription is essential to the full display of Petrarch's genius, and *terza rima*, a metre favourable to diffuseness, does not exhibit his powers to such advantage as the severe restriction of his sonnets and canzoni. The poem, nevertheless, if a little garrulous, charms by deep feeling and a succession of delightful if not transcendent beauties. The finest portion is the Triumph of Death, when Laura appears, and addresses the poet to much the same effect as in his sonnets written after her decease. "L'on est vraiment touché de voir que dans un âge avancé Pétrarque ne se consolàit encore de l'avoir perdue qu'en se rappelant et se retraçant dans ses vers tout ce qui lui faisait croire que Laura en effet l'avait aimé" (Ginguené). It was begun in 1357, and is not entirely complete, though Petrarch continued to add and retouch until within a very short time of his death. The last lines relate to Laura, who, present or absent, is always the inspiration of the poem. Petrarch evidently wrote greatly under the influence of his reminiscences of Dante, and this may account for his unwillingness, frequently attributed to unworthy jealousy, to concern himself with his predecessor in his latter years. He knew that Dante's spirit was more potent than his,

and feared to be subjugated by it, as has happened to many. He has himself been imitated by Shelley in the *Triumph of Life.*

The odes with which the *Canzoniere* is interspersed are no less beautiful than the sonnets, but are less adapted for quotation, since it is impossible to give any one in its entirety, and they must greatly suffer by abridgment. There is, however, a certain completeness in the first three stanzas of *Chiare, fresche, e dolci acque,* excellently translated by Leigh Hunt:

"*Clear, fresh, and dulcet streams,*
Which the fair shape who seems
To me sole woman, haunted at noon-tide;
Fair bough, so gently fit
(I sigh to think of it),
Which lent a pillow to her lovely side;
And turf, and flowers bright-eyed,
O'er which her folded gown
Flowed like an angel's down;
And you, oh holy air and hushed,
Where first my heart at her sweet glances gushed;
Give ear, give ear with one consenting,
To my last words, my last, and my lamenting.

If 'tis my fate below,
And Heaven will have it so,
That love must close these dying eyes in tears,
May my poor dust be laid
In middle of your shade,
While my soul naked mounts to its own spheres.
The thought would calm my fears,
When taking, out of breath,
The doubtful step of death;
For never could my spirit find
A stiller port after the stormy wind,
Nor in more calm, abstracted bourne
Slip from my travailed flesh, and from my bones outworn

Perhaps, some future hour,
To her accustomed bower
Might come the untamed, and yet the gentle she;
And where she saw me first,
Might turn with eyes athirst
And kinder joy to look again for me;
Then, oh, the charity!
Seeing amid the stones
The earth that held my bones,
A sigh for very love at last
Might ask of Heaven to pardon me the past;
And Heaven itself could not say nay,
As with her gentle veil she wiped the tears away."

Not much need be said of Petrarch's character, whether as poet, scholar, or man. As a poet he deserves to be numbered among the few who have attained absolute perfection within a certain sphere; to whom within these limits nothing can be added, though much may be taken away. The subtraction of the trivial or fantastic from Petrarch's verse leaves, nevertheless, a mass of love-poetry transcending in amount no less than in loveliness all poetry of the same class from the pen of any other man. If immortality is deservedly awarded to a single masterpiece like the *Burial of Sir John Moore* or the *Pervigilium Veneris*, it should not be difficult to estimate his claims whose similar masterpieces are counted by scores. Perhaps the greatest of his beauties is the complete naturalness of his ceaseless succession of thoughts transcendently exquisite. If Petrarch has not the thrilling note or transparent spirituality of Dante, his perfect form represents a higher stage of artistic development—too high, indeed, to be maintained by his successors. A just parallel might be drawn between the three great sonnet-writers of the Latin peoples, Dante, Petrarch,

Camoens; the three orders of architecture, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian; and the three great ancient dramatists.

It is noteworthy that Petrarch does not appear as the representative poet of the mediæval or of any other period. Horace and Ovid would have admired him as much as his contemporaries did, and he is as fresh and bright in the nineteenth as in the fourteenth century. Many have pursued him, none have overtaken him. His prose works, on the contrary, bear the stamp of their age, and exist for ours mainly as curiosities and documentary illustrations of bygone manners and ways of thinking. This was inevitable; he could not have been the literary sovereign of his age had he been very greatly in advance of it. He looked down upon it sufficiently to dislike it, as he tells us, and prepare a better. As a man he had shining virtues and few faults, except such as are almost inseparable from the characters of poets, orators, and lovers, and which men like Dante only avoid at the cost of less amiable failings. His nearest parallel is perhaps with Cicero, and would appear closer if Petrarch had, or Cicero had not, been called upon to take a highly responsible part in public affairs.

Of Petrarch's vast influence upon English poetry since the time of Wyatt and Surrey, who may be justly called his disciples, it is needless to say anything, except that it is even more to be traced in the general refinement of diction than by the imitation of particular passages.

The best critical edition is Mestica's, founded mainly upon scrupulous examination of a manuscript partly written by Petrarch himself, partly by an amanuensis under his direction. It may almost be wished that Mestica had not such good authority for some of his disturbances of time-hallowed readings. By much the

best exegetical commentary is Leopardi's, a model of pregnant conciseness, and invaluable for clearing up difficulties, although frequently proffering explanation where explanation seems needless. The late Henry Reeve's English biography, though condensed, is fully adequate. The appreciation of the Petrarchan sonnet-forms, never to be tampered with without detriment, has been mainly promoted in England by the late Charles Tomlinson.

CHAPTER VII

BOCCACCIO

If the works of the third great Italian writer cannot be compared to Dante's for sublimity, or to Petrarch's for perfection of style, the most important of them is of even greater significance in the history of culture. By his *Decameron* Giovanni Boccaccio[1] endowed his country with a classic prose, and won for himself a unique place as the first modern novelist.

Boccaccio always speaks of himself as "of Certaldo," a small Tuscan town under Florentine dominion, where he possessed some property. It would seem, however, from his own expressions, not to have been his birthplace. This was most probably Florence. The early legend of his birth at Paris rests upon a too absolute identification of himself with a character in his *Ameto*. His birth probably took place in 1313; and, if not early orphaned of his mother, he must have been an illegitimate child. His father, a Florentine merchant of the prudent and thrifty type, had him taught grammar and arithmetic, sent him into a counting-house at thirteen, and four years afterwards placed him with a mercantile firm at Naples. When, after two years, the youth's distaste to trade proved insuperable, the father made him study law

[1] When preceded by the Christian name, "Boccaccio" ought, in strictness, to lose the final vowel, but this would seem pedantic in English.

at the Neapolitan University. It is not likely that he gave much attention to so dry a subject amid the dis tractions of the lively city, where he was insensibly receiving the inspiration of his future poetry and fiction.

Notwithstanding the accusation of stinginess brought against his father, Boccaccio must apparently have possessed considerable means, mixing in the best society of Naples. He probably owed much to the Florentine extraction of Nicola Acciajuoli, a leading personage, and subsequently Grand Seneschal of the kingdom. By 1338 he had progressed so far as to fall in love with the lady he has celebrated as Fiammetta, but whose real name was Maria, putative daughter of the Count of Aquino, but generally believed to be the offspring of King Robert himself. Fiammetta was married. The degree in which she returned his passion is uncertain, but she appears to have exerted considerable influence upon his career as an author. He composed the *Filocopo* for her entertainment about 1339, and the close of his activity as an imaginative writer about twelve years afterwards coincides with the probable period of her death. *Ameto* and *Fiammetta*, in both of which she is celebrated were written after Boccaccio's return to Florence whither he was recalled by his unsympathising father about 1340; here the wild oats sown at Naples came up in a plentiful crop of fiction and poetry. Literary productions must have occupied most of Boccaccio's time until 1345, when, probably on account of his father's remarriage, he returned to Naples, where he is said to have begun the *Decameron* under the patronage of Queen Joanna. In 1348 the pestilence which devastated Florence carried off his father. Boccaccio returned in 1349 to arrange family affairs, and thenceforth appears in

quite a new light, as a trusty diplomatist, the author of various manuals (*Genealogiæ deorum gentilium*, *De casibus virorum illustrium*, &c.) of the information most sought for in the age, and, under Petrarch's direction, a chief agent in the promotion of humanistic studies. Copies of Terence and Apuleius are extant in his handwriting.

One of Boccaccio's first duties after he had settled himself in his native city was to entertain Petrarch upon his visit in 1350, and one of his first public missions, performed in the following year, was to solicit him to fix his residence at Florence and enter the service of the Republic. Petrarch declined to entrust his repose to so unstable a community, but his acquaintance with Boccaccio ripened into an intimacy which might have been compared to that of Goethe and Schiller if Boccaccio had not gracefully and judiciously assumed a tone of deference to the acknowledged sovereign of contemporary literature. He is indefatigable in literary suit and service. His piety towards Dante as well as Petrarch leads him to transcribe for the latter the *Divine Comedy*. His equal affection for Petrarch and classical studies made him at Petrarch's instigation entertain an erudite but uncomfortable Greek, Leontius Pilatus, who rendered Homer for him into very lame Latin; but still it was Homer that he read; while the mediæval epicist of the Trojan war, Josephus Iscanus, had known his theme only in Dares Phrygius and Dictys Cretensis.

Landor has delightfully depicted a supposed visit of Petrarch to Boccaccio at Certaldo; one only regrets that the conversation of the poets should turn so exclusively on Dante. Petrarch rendered his friend one inestimable service in dissuading him from the renunciation of the world, into which he had been almost scared

by the prophecies and denunciations of an expiring monk. Boccaccio nevertheless so far profited by these admonitions as to write nothing more to which morality could take exception. Shortly before his end he received one of the most honourable and appropriate commissions with which he could have been entrusted, that of delivering public lectures on Dante, which he had carried down to the seventeenth canto of the *Inferno*, when death overtook him on December 21, 1375.

The *Filocopo*, Boccaccio's first and longest work of fiction, would be thought intolerably tedious at the present day, when one must be indeed φιλοκόπος to get through it. It forms nevertheless a most important landmark in the history of literature, for it signalises the transition from the metrical romance to the pure novel. Something similar had been attempted two centuries earlier in the delightful miniature romance of mingled prose and verse, *Aucassin and Nicolette*, but the example had not been followed. About the middle of the thirteenth century the *Novellino* had been compiled with a distinct moral purpose, but its hundred tales are rather anecdotes than novelettes. The *Filocopo* is founded upon the ancient lay of Floris and Blanchefleur, which Boccaccio has converted into prose, with a copious admixture of new incidents, characters, and descriptions. There is little semblance of probability in the incidents, or accurate delineation in the characters, while the diction, though polished, is full of what would now be justly considered affectation and bad taste. In the fourteenth century it was neither, but the faithful image of the mental ferment inevitably produced by the irruption of the classical spirit into the contracted world of the Middle Age. Everything, indeed, was confused and

bewildered; as the blind man suddenly restored to sight saw men as trees, so the classical forms appeared most strangely distorted in the mediæval atmosphere. This ignorance, which might have excited the reprehension of critics in Boccaccio's age, had such then existed, is the salvation of his book in ours: his mistaken erudition has become charming naïveté, and the eloquence which no longer impresses at least amuses. For its own day the *Filocopo* was an epoch-making work, and traces of its style may be met with until the displacement of the ideal romance by the novel of manners, a development of which the fourteenth century had no notion; although Petronius, as yet unknown, had given an example as early as the age of Nero. Boccaccio's affinities are rather with Apuleius, whom he frequently follows in the *Decameron*.

The *Ameto* of Boccaccio also possesses considerable importance in literary history, being the first well-defined modern instance of an important *genre*, the pastoral romance, afterwards carried to perfection by Sannazaro and Montemayor; and also of a literary artifice, the interweaving of several stories to compose a whole. The stories are not very attractive, and the combination is not very well managed, but the idea was an important contribution to literature, and, though Longus is more likely to find emulators than Boccaccio, the pastoral romance still has a future before it. The tales are supposed to record the experiences of shepherdesses who personify the virtues, and that placed in the mouth of Fiammetta is certainly in some measure autobiographical.

More autobiographical still, and consequently nearer to the truth of nature, is the romance called after Fiammetta, the precursor of the modern psychological novel,

although a germ that long remained unproductive in unkindly soil. Written, probably, about 1346, it is halfway in style between the *Filocopo* and the *Decameron*, and the plot is simplicity itself in comparison with the bewildering intricacy of the former. It is merely Fiammetta's own detail of her unfortunate passion for a young Tuscan, and her lamentation for his inconstancy after his recall to his home by a stern father. The autobiographical element is unquestionable, but it is extremely unlikely that Boccaccio would have accused himself of infidelity in the person of Pamfilo. It has been conjectured to be the work of some anonymous writer who took him as a hero; but had this been so, the fact would assuredly have come to light. It is more probable that it represents, not Fiammetta's feelings, but his own, and that, to avoid gossip, or for artistic reasons, he inverted the situation and the characters. Fiammetta undoubtedly excites more interest than Pamfilo could have done, and her sufferings appear in a more tragic light as the penalty of her breach of conjugal fidelity.

It may also well be the case that Boccaccio, finding his affection for Fiammetta on the wane, anticipated Goethe by hastening to cleanse his bosom of the perilous stuff while it yet retained sufficient vitality for the purposes of art. However this may be, Fiammetta has the merits and defects of Werther, real pathos and truth to nature associated with the tedium hardly separable from a long monologue, however well composed; and Boccaccio's style here, although a great advance on that of the *Filocopo*, still suffers from ambitious rhetoric and a superfluity of adjectives. Great part of the book, nevertheless, attains the level of true eloquence; and Boccaccio did much for prose when he proved it to be

an apt medium for the expression of passions heretofore chiefly restricted to verse.

His fame, nevertheless, rests on his *Decameron*, for here he attained the perfection which elsewhere he only indicated. Among many lights in which this epoch-making book may be regarded is that of an alliance between the elegant but superfine literature of courts and the vigorous but homely literature of the people. Nobles and ladies, accustomed to far-fetched and ornate compositions like the *Filocopo*, heard the same stories which amused the common people, told in a style which the uneducated too could apprehend and enjoy, but purged of all roughness and vulgarity, and, in truth, such masterpieces of clear, forcible prose as the greatest scholars had till then been unable to produce. All that we know of Boccaccio leads to the conclusion that his true mission was to have been a poet of the people, such an one as the unknown balladists who in simple ages have given immortal form to popular traditions, or as the Burnses and Heines who in artificial periods have gone back to the fountains of popular song. Neither of these was a possible part in the fourteenth century; but if Boccaccio is in no respect archaic, the sap of his best work is drawn from the soil of popular interest and sympathy.

Few of the stories are of Boccaccio's invention; the originals of some may be discovered in traditionary folk-lore, of others in French fabliaux or classical or Oriental writers; very many are probably true histories in every respect but for the alteration of the names. This is Boccaccio's best defence against the charge of licentiousness — he did not, like so many others, write with the express purpose of stimulating the passions, but reproduced the ordinary talk of hours of relaxation,

giving it the attraction of a pure and classic style. The share of the ladies as narrators of or listeners to these loose stories, so repugnant to ideal conceptions of the female character, is not only explained by the manners of the time, but has greatly contributed to the charm of his work by tempering its licence with a refinement best appreciated by comparison with such similar collections as the *Facetiæ* of Poggio. After all, the sensuous element, though conspicuous, is not predominant in the *Decameron*, and few books contain more or finer traits of courtesy, humanity, and generosity.

Prose fiction had existed before Boccaccio, and his manner had been in some measure anticipated by some of the tales which have found their way into the *Cento Novelle Antiche*, but he was probably the first to employ in Europe the Oriental device of setting his stories in a frame. The structure of the *Decameron* is too generally known to render it necessary to more than barely mention its scheme as a succession of stories told by ten persons in ten successive days, on the feigned occasion of the retirement of a *lieta brigata* to a delightful retreat from the plague which devastated Florence in 1348. Many among us will think that they ought to have remained to aid their perishing fellow-countrymen, and, what is more, would themselves have done so. But it would be absurd to blame the fourteenth century for a conception of public duty and a completeness of organisation in public calamity which did not and could not exist in it. Mediæval Italy produced but one Florence Nightingale, and she was a saint. The step once taken, the exclusion of all unpleasant tidings was its indispensable corollary; and hence the scene of the story-telling, with its groves and orchards, gardens and fountains,

charming company and frank converse, has ever remained one of the green spots on which imagination loves to rest.

Such an ideal of cultivated society afforded no room for the vivacity of delineation so admirable in Chaucer's portraits derived from all classes; yet the prologue and the little introductory passages to each day are, with their feeling for landscape and poetic truth, even more delightful than the stories themselves. If, as seems probable, some of these were composed at Naples before the pestilence, this lovely framework must have been an afterthought. Of Boccaccio's greatness as a master of narrative, nothing need here be said, unless that his progressiveness is even more surprising than his talent. Ten years (1339–49) had sufficed to raise him from the eloquent but confused and hyperbolical style of the *Filocopo* to the perfection of Italian narrative. He was now the unapproached model of later story-tellers, who can, indeed, produce stronger effects by the employment of stronger means, but have never been able to rival him on his own ground of easy, unaffected simplicity.

Two minor works of Boccaccio, written subsequently to the *Decameron*, deserve a word of notice—the *Corbaccio*, a lampoon upon a widow who had jilted him, which does him no credit morally, but evinces much satiric force; and the *Urbano*, a pretty little romance of the identification of an emperor's abandoned son—the genuineness of which, however, has sometimes been doubted.

It was the constant destiny of Boccaccio to make epochs—producing something absolutely or virtually new, and tracing out the ways in which his successors, far as they might outstrip him, were bound to walk.

We have seen that the heroic, the pastoral, the familiar romance owed, if not their actual birth, at least their first considerable beginnings to him; and his activity was no less important in the domain of narrative poetry. He may not have been the inventor of the octave stanza, but undoubtedly he was the first to show its supreme fitness for narrative, and thus mark out the channel in which the epic genius of Italy has flowed ever since. The peculiar grace of her language, and its affluence of rhymes, adapt it especially to this singularly elegant, if not massive or sublime, form of versification, superior for narrative purposes to the sinuous and digressive *terza rima*, or to Italian counterfeits of the majestic blank verse of England. It could not be expected that Boccaccio's attempts should at first display all the perfection his metre is capable of receiving, he is undoubtedly lax and diffuse. Yet all the main recommendations of the octave are discoverable in his *Teseide* and *Filostrato*, poems especially interesting to English readers from the imitation —frequently translation—of them in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* and *Troilus*. The *Teseide* is the earlier, having been composed shortly after Boccaccio's return to Florence in 1340 for the gratification of his Neapolitan mistress; while the *Filostrato*, apparently composed upon his second visit to Naples about 1347, is a disguised satire upon her inconstancy.

Both from the acuteness of feeling thus engendered, and from the rapid progress Boccaccio had in the interim made in the poetic art, the *Filostrato* is the more powerful and poetical composition; the prosperity of Troilus's love while returned, for example, is described in the liveliest colours and with the truest feeling. The *Teseide*, on the other hand, has the advantage of a more

dignified and heroic story, known to the English reader, not only from Chaucer, but from Dryden's imitation of the latter in his *Palamon and Arcite.* It also gave the plot to Fletcher's *Two Noble Kinsmen.* Boccaccio's source is uncertain, but is believed to have been some Greek romance written under the later Roman Empire. If so, he can only have been acquainted with it in a Latin translation, now lost as well as the original. His own poem was translated back into Greek in a miserable Romaic version printed in 1529. For the tale of *Troilus and Cressida* he had Guido de Colonna's history of the Trojan war, itself indebted for this episode to an ancient metrical romance.

The little idyllic narrative *Ninfale Fiesolano* is one of the most attractive of Boccaccio's minor writings. It relates the breach of "Diana's law" by one of her nymphs, and its tragical consequences—the suicide of the lover, and the metamorphosis, or rather the assumption of the nymph into the waters of a river; although the fruit of their union survives to become a hero and found the city of Fiesole. If, as is probable, somewhat later than the *Filostrato,* this pleasing little story evinces Boccaccio's increasing mastery of the octave couplet, ease of narrative, and power of natural description. Had he continued to compose in verse, he would probably have ranked higher among Italian poets than he does now.

The *Amorosa Visione* is an earlier and very different work. It is written in *terza rima,* and betrays an evident ambition to imitate Dante, while in its turn it has not been without influence on Petrarch's *Trionfi.* Like the latter, it testifies to the mediæval love of allegories and stately shows, and may well have aided to inspire the

Polifilo of Francesco Colonna. The poet is conducted through a number of visions illustrative of the pomps and vanities of the world, and the poem leaves off just as, by command of his mistress, he is about to attempt the narrow way which he should have taken at first. Written apparently for the entertainment of a courtly circle, and encumbered with fantastic acrostics, it reveals little of the deep feeling of its predecessor or its successor; but if regarded simply as the description of a series of pageants, must be allowed the merits of fertile invention and glowing colour. Boccaccio's enthusiastic praise of Dante, whom he calls the lord of all science, and the source of everything, if there be anything, excellent in himself, is highly honourable to him.

A good example of Boccaccio's epic vein is afforded by the prayer of Emilia to Diana in the *Teseide*, uttered when Palamon and Arcite are about to fight for her sake. For this, as for several other versions, the writer is indebted to Miss Ellen Clerke:

"*She thus in broken vows 'mid sighs began:*
'Chaste Goddess, who dost purify the glades,
And of a maiden train dost lead the van,
And him chastises who thy law evades,
As lost Actæon learned in briefest span,
Who, young and hapless, smit 'mid sylvan shades,
Not by scourge whip, but by thy wrath celestial,
Fled as a stag in transformation bestial.

'Hear, then, my voice, if worthy of thy care,
While I implore by thy divinity,
In triple form, accept my lowly prayer,
And if it be an easy task to thee
To perfect it—I prithee strive, if e'er
Soft pity filled thy heart so cold and free
For maiden client who in prayer addrest thee,
And who for grace or favour did request thee.

'For I, a maiden of thy maiden train,
Am fitter far, with quiver and with bow,
To roam the forest, than 'neath love's soft reign
To do a husband's will; and if thou go
In memory back, thou must in mind retain
How harder face than granite did we show
'Gainst headlong Venus' law, based not on reason,
But headlong passion, to its promptings treason.

'And if it be my better fate to stay
A little maid amid thy vestal throng,
The fierce and burning fumes do thou allay
Sprung from desires so passionate and strong
Of both the enamoured youths my love who pray,
And both for joy of love from me do long,
Let peace supplant between them war's contention,
Since grief to me, thou know'st, is their dissension.

'And if it be reserved for me by fate
To Juno's law subjected now to be,
Ah, pardon thou my lapse from maiden state,
Nor therefore be my prayer refused by thee;
On others' will, thou seest, condemned to wait,
My actions must conform to their decree:
Then help me, Goddess, hear my prayer thus lowly,
Who still deserve thy favour high and holy.'"

Boccaccio thought little of his own poetry, would have destroyed his sonnets but for the remonstrances of Petrarch, and laments that even the incitement of Fiammetta is unavailing to spur him on to the Temple of Fame. Yet in another place he says that he has spared no pains to excel:

"Study I have not spared, or scanted time:
Now rest unto my labour I permit,
Lamenting this so little could avail
To raise me to that eminence sublime."

This judgment was unreasonably severe. It is true, nevertheless, that Boccaccio would have gained more

renown as a poet if the taste of his time had permitted him to seek inspiration among the people for his verses, as he did for his stories. How exquisite he could sometimes be is shown by two of the sonnets translated by Rossetti—versions, it must be owned, which surpass the originals:

"*Love steered my course, while yet the sun rode high,*
On Scylla's waters to a myrtle-grove:
The heaven was still and the sea did not move;
Yet now and then a little breeze went by,
Stirring the tops of trees against the sky:
And then I heard a song as glad as love,
So sweet that never yet the like thereof
Was heard in any mortal company.
'A nymph, a goddess, or an angel sings
Unto herself, within this chosen place
Of ancient loves,' so said I at that sound.
And there my lady, 'mid the shadowings
Of myrtle-trees, 'mid flowers and grassy space,
Singing I saw, with others who sat round.

By a clear well, within a little field
Full of green grass and flowers of every hue,
Sat three young girls, relating (as I knew)
Their loves: and each had twined a bough to shield
Her lovely face; and the green leaves did yield
The golden hair their shadow; while the two
Sweet colours mingled, both blown lightly through
With a soft wind for ever stirred and stilled.
After a little while one of them said
(I heard her), 'Think! if ere the next hour struck,
Each of our lovers should come here to-day,
Think you that we should fly or feel afraid?
To whom the others answered, 'From such luck
A girl would be a fool to run away.'"

Apart from the merits of his writings, Boccaccio might rest a claim to no ordinary renown as the creator of classic Italian prose; and even if he had found this

instrument ready to his hand, his work with it might alone have assured him immortality. Perhaps he has a still higher title to fame in his quality as a great originator, achieving, indeed, no consummate work except the *Decameron*, but reconnoitring the unknown world through which the human spirit travels, and opening out new paths on every side as he steers "bound upon beating wing to golden bough." As the first effective exemplar of the heroic and pastoral romance and of the epic in octave stanza, as the principal populariser of classical lore, his influence will be felt to the end of time. The books which gave him this power are, indeed, comparatively forgotten. On the other hand, the great marvel of his *Decameron* is its undying freshness. The language is as terse and bright, the tale as readable as ever: the commentator may exercise his research in detecting the sources of the stories, but has little to do in explaining obsolete diction or obsolete manners.

In morals and conduct, until his latter days, Boccaccio seems to have been a perfect type of the gay and easy class of Florentine citizens, and as remote as possible from the wary and penurious burghers depicted in his tale of the Pot of Basil. Apart from the fair and courteous presence revealed in the *Decameron*, his principal titles to moral esteem are his disinterested love of culture, his enthusiasm for his master Dante, and his obsequious yet graceful demeanour towards Petrarch, embodying sentiments which could have found no entrance into an ungenerous breast.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

A JUST remark of Coventry Patmore's on the contrast between Dante and Shakespeare in their relation to their respective literatures might be extended to the Italian literature of the fourteenth century in general: it has lofty peaks, but little elevated table-land. Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio tower above their contemporaries, who, viewed from such eminences, are almost indiscernible. It might have been expected, nevertheless, that the example of surpassing excellence, which could complain of no want of popularity or recognition, would have powerfully stimulated contemporaries and successors, and that, as Homer gave birth to the Cyclic poets, and Alcæus followed in the wake of Alcman, the great Italians would have appeared as the immediate progenitors of epicists, lyrists, and novelists of kindred if inferior power. On the contrary, the century from the death of Boccaccio to the appearance of Lorenzo de' Medici as a poet is the most barren in Italian literary history. It produces no vernacular writer of genius, and but few of eminent talent. It is indeed no reproach to it to have brought forth no second Dante, or to have failed, like all other ages, to reproduce the inimitable perfection of Petrarch. But it might have been anticipated that the new ways opened

out by Boccaccio alike in metrical epic and in prose narrative would have been followed up, and that history and allied branches of literature would have assumed a classic form.

Little of the kind occurred, and classical study itself ceased to produce a vivifying effect upon letters. This may have been partly owing to excessive admiration for the ancient writers, degenerating into pedantic imitation; partly from the great demand for Latin translations from the Greek, and Latin official correspondence, encouraging Latin composition at the expense of the vernacular; but cannot be wholly explained by any cause peculiar to Italy, for the same phenomenon manifested itself over Europe. Chaucer, who had carried the poetry of England so high, had no successors; and it would be difficult to point to a work of genius anywhere, except the *Imitatio Christi*, which might have been produced in any Christian age, and the *Amadis of Gaul*, the parent of the romances of chivalry, composed in Portugal or Spain about the beginning of the fifteenth century. How far this is to be ascribed to the Black Death, which, in sweeping away so much of the existing generation, blighted so much of the hope of the future; how far to calamities like the Great Schism and the Jacquerie; how far to causes unfathomable by the human intellect, will always be a question.

Certain it is that, while material civilisation continued to develop, and Leonardo Bruni, thinking only of the cultivation of Greek, is able to say, "Letters at this time grew mightily in Italy," creative genius received a check; and the standard of public virtue in most countries fell lower than it had ever been, or has been

again. We can only note the few who in Italy, otherwise than as classical scholars, did anything to vindicate their age from the imputation of intellectual barrenness. Two didactic poems with epic affinities, produced, one shortly before, the other shortly after the death of Boccaccio, attest more than pages of panegyric the power with which Dante controlled the imaginations of his countrymen. FAZIO DEGLI UBERTI, a Florentine of whose life little is known, except that he spent most of it in exile, and died about 1367, seems to have thought that if Dante had appropriated heaven, hell, and purgatory, the earth at least remained for himself. He undertook to describe, in a number of cantos in *terza rima*, his perlustration of it under the escort of a singular guide, the Latin topographer Solinus. What Solinus is to Virgil, Uberti is to Dante; yet, though an uninspired, he is not a contemptible writer. His geographical epic the *Dittamondo* (Discourse of the World) may be unduly prejudiced in the eyes of English readers from Rossetti's rendering of a canto in blank verse. It would indeed have been a waste of time to have striven to reproduce the original metre, yet Uberti's tercets glide with an ease and fluency of which the blank verse gives no notion. The poem is not altogether destitute of poetical spirit; one conception, that of the forlorn Genius of Rome herself guiding the poet to her ruins, is truly fine, but force was wanting to work it out. Otherwise it is chiefly interesting as a repertory of the geographical knowledge and fancies of the age. The canto on England has been translated by Rossetti, and is entertaining from its naïveté. Uberti must have been an accomplished man, for he intersperses French and Provençal verses with his Italian. He is more truly a

poet in his lyrical than in his epic performances, if, at least, the sonnets and canzoni which pass under his name are really his. One, translated by Rossetti, has so much poetical merit as to have been frequently ascribed to Dante:

> "*I look at the crisp golden-threaded hair*
> *Whereof, to thrall my heart, Love twists a net;*
> *Using at times a string of pearls for bait,*
> *And sometimes with a single rose therein.*
> *I look into her eyes, which unaware,*
> *Though mine own eyes to her heart penetrate;*
> *Their splendour, that is excellently great,*
> *To the sun's radiance seeming near akin,*
> *Yet from herself a sweeter light to win.*
> *So that I, gazing on that lovely one,*
> *Discourse in this wise with my secret thought:*
> *'Woe's me! why am I not,*
> *Even as my wish, alone with her alone,—*
> *That hair of hers, so heavily uplaid,*
> *To shed down braid by braid,*
> *And make myself two mirrors of her eyes*
> *Within whose light all other glory dies?'*"

Another writer of mark, nearer than Fazio to Dante both in style and subject, is FREDERICO FREZZI, citizen and bishop of Foligno, who died at the Council of Constance in 1416. His *Quatriregio*, a moral poem describing the author's progress through the realms of Love, Pluto, the Vices and Virtue, so close an imitation of Dante as to border upon servility, is, notwithstanding, not a mean performance. Frezzi has considerable rhetorical, if not much poetical power, and many passages are really impressive. The diction also is good; but the book's chief repute at this day is among artists, on account of the remarkable designs adorning the edition of 1506, which

present an affinity to Botticelli's illustrations of Dante, and have been attributed, although on insufficient authority, to Luca Signorelli. The poem was republished at Foligno in 1725, with a learned commentary, of which it was in great need. MATTEO PALMIERI'S poem, *Città di Vita*, probably much in Frezzi's style, arouses interest from its having been suppressed as heretical, but its poetical merit has never yet sufficed to allure a publisher. "The object," says Symonds, who read it in MS., "is to show how free-will is innate in men." It is founded upon an actual vision, according to the assertion of the author.

Many other poets might be mentioned, but they are now mere names, except SENUCCIO DEL BENE, chiefly renowned as Petrarch's friend, but himself a graceful writer, and two of considerably later date, of one of whom it may be truly if paradoxically said that he is chiefly remembered for being forgotten. This is DOMENICO BURCHIELLO, a standing example of the fickleness of popular taste. He was a Florentine, who lived from about 1400 to 1448, and composed numerous burlesque sonnets *alla coda* (with a tag of three lines), which retained sufficient vitality to go through thirty editions soon after the invention of printing, but are now inevitably neglected, inasmuch as the Florentine slang in which they are mainly composed has ceased to be amusing, or even intelligible. The other poet of the period, GIUSTO DE' CONTI, a jurist, who lived at the court of Sigismondo Malatesta, Prince of Rimini, and died there about 1452, is remarkable as the chief contemporary imitator of Petrarch, whom he followed with such servility as greatly to impair the credit otherwise due to him for the sweetness of his verse and the occasional

dignity of his style. His collection of sonnets, entitled *La Bella Mano*, from its perpetual reference to the beauties of his lady's hand, stands out at all events, as even an inferior work might have done, from the almost total poetical barrenness of the middle of the fifteenth century, otherwise only relieved by the elegant sonnets of another Petrarchist, Bonaccorso da Montemagno, and the popular carols which gained Leonardo Giustiniani deserved reputation.

More genuine poetry is to be found in the occasional lyrics of two writers near the end of the fourteenth century, chiefly eminent in a different species of composition, the novelette. FRANCO SACCHETTI and GIOVANNI FIORENTINO are artists in words, and men of true poetic feeling. A canzonet of Sacchetti's (the earliest Italian poet, says Rossetti, with whom playfulness was a characteristic), *O vaghe montanine pastorelle*, was so popular as to have been transmitted for some generations by oral recitation, while his novelettes, until printed in the eighteenth century, existed only in a single mutilated manuscript. This is the conclusion of Rossetti's translation of this charming lyric:

"'*I think your beauties might make great complaint*
Of being thus shown ever mount and dell;
Because no city is so excellent
But that your stay therein were honourable.
In very truth now does it like you well
To live so poorly on the hill-side here?'

'*Better it liketh one of us, pardie,*
Behind her flock to seek the pasture-stance,
Far better than it liketh one of ye
To ride unto your curtained rooms and dance.
We seek no riches, neither golden chance,
Save wealth of flowers to weave into our hair.'

'Ballad, if I were now as once I was,
I'd make myself a shepherd on some hill,
And, without telling any one, would pass
Where these girls went, and follow at their will,
And "Mary," and "Martin," we would murmur still,
And I would be for ever where they were.'"

This exquisite poem, however, rather belongs to the late fourteenth than to the early fifteenth century, as do other songs of equal beauty by Sacchetti and his contemporaries, which contrast favourably with earlier Italian lyrics by their brevity and simplicity. This is partly attributable to their having been in general written for music. Some of the most charming examples have been collected in Carducci's *Studi Letterari.*

Sacchetti and Giovanni mark the termination of the *Trecentisti* period. Many writings of their contemporaries have been printed as models of pure diction, but are otherwise too unimportant to deserve independent notice in a literary history.[1] After the beginning of the fifteenth century Italian prose for a while declined, mainly from the false standard of excellence produced by exaggerated enthusiasm for the newly recovered classics. Neglecting the spirit, though only too attentive to the letter, of these models, writers corrupted their diction with Latinisms. The best books were histories, and the best of these were written in Latin. It might have been said that to find a really good vernacular historian we must go back to the fourteenth century, were it not for the doubts which beset the alleged chronicle of DINO COMPAGNI, which professedly details events at Florence from 1286 to 1318. The question of its genuineness has aroused the sharpest

[1] Many will be found in a collection unfortunately published on too limited a scale to be generally accessible, Daelli's *Biblioteca Rara.*

controversy, which cannot be regarded as even yet absolutely determined: the prevailing opinion, however, seems to be that it is a fabrication dating from about 1450. It is so entertaining that one would wish it trustworthy.

GINO CAPPONI, a leading Florentine citizen of the latter fourteenth and earlier fifteenth century, has left valuable memoirs of some of the transactions in which he was engaged. The great Florentine historian of the age, however, is GIOVANNI VILLANI, a characteristic embodiment of all the better qualities of his city, who, inspired by ardent patriotism, wrote its history, including a review of the contemporary transactions of the world, from the Tower of Babel to 1346, on the verge of the Black Death of 1348, by which he was himself carried off. His work was continued by his brother Matteo and his nephew Filippo to 1368. Villani possessed every qualification which experience of public business could afford, having filled several important offices, among them those of Prior and Master of the Mint. His language is exceedingly pure, his fidelity and impartiality are beyond suspicion, and he is peculiarly valuable from his preservation of financial and economical details, and other matters affecting ordinary life. He would have been a model historian if he had lived when the spirit of critical inquiry was awake, and historians had learned the delineation of character and the artistic construction of narrative; he must, however, in this case have forfeited the golden simplicity which renders his narrative so delightful. His nephew Filippo, who lived far into the fifteenth century, wrote in Latin the *Lives of Illustrious Florentines*, already cited as an authority on Dante. His memoir of Boccaccio has been frequently reprinted.

No place having hitherto occurred suitable for mention of the *Travels of Marco Polo*, they, although belonging to the thirteenth century, may find mention here. From the purely literary point of view they are of no great importance, but as the first book that opened the knowledge of the East to Europeans, their significance cannot be overrated. Mention should also be made of another traveller, CIRIACO DI ANCONA, the first archæologist, who, in the second quarter of the fifteenth century, set the example of collecting inscriptions and works of antiquity.

The next prose author whom it is necessary to mention, ENEA SILVIO PICCOLOMINI, afterwards Pope Pius the Second (1405–64), writing solely in Latin, has no place in the literary history of the Italian language, but is perhaps the most typical example of the fifteenth-century man of letters, accomplished, versatile, adroit, imperfectly restrained by principle, but inspired by a genuine zeal for culture and humanity. No literary personage since Petrarch had displayed such various activity, or, by his controversial, no less than by his diplomatic ability, had exerted an equal influence in the affairs of Church and State. Apart from the substantial merits of his writings, Æneas is a typical figure as indicating that the pen was beginning to govern the world, and that literary dexterity could make a Pope of a struggling adventurer. As an author he has come down to our day by his Commentaries of his own times, one of that valuable class of histories whose authors can say, "Pars magna fui"; and by his *Euryalus and Lucretia*, a romance founded on an actual occurrence, and noteworthy as a precursor of the modern novel.

In LEONE BATTISTA ALBERTI (1404–72) we at length

encounter a humanist accomplished alike in the learned and the vulgar tongue; while, like Leonardo da Vinci, to whom he offers a strong resemblance, less remarkable for any particular work than for the universality of his genius. An architect and mathematician, an engineer and the inventor of the camera obscura, he was almost the first of the moderns to treat these subjects scientifically, and extended his researches to painting and sculpture. His literary celebrity, however, arises rather from his treatise *Della Famiglia*, a model of practical wisdom, couched in the clear and cheerful spirit of a Goethe, and affording a pleasing insight into the Italian family life of the period, as yet unspoiled by luxury. "What he says about the beauty of the body is worthy of a Greek, what he says about exercise might have been written by an Englishman" (Symonds). The third book, superior to the others in diction, has been attributed to Agnolo Pandolfini, a distinguished Florentine statesman of an earlier date, but Alberti's claim to it seems satisfactorily established. His *Iciarchia*, a treatise on the ideal prince, is also a remarkable work; and his novelette, *Ippolito and Leonora*, founded on a Florentine tradition, is distinguished by pathos and simplicity. Alberti was the natural son of a Florentine exile, and was born at Genoa. His early years were years of hardship. Restored to his ancestral city, he there executed important architectural and engineering works, and subsequently metamorphosed into a splendid temple the old church at Rimini, which Sigismondo Malatesta dedicated in its altered form to the memory of his mistress Isotta. He was afterwards abbreviator of Papal briefs at Rome Deprived of this office, along with sixty-nine other eminent scholars, by the Philistine but practical Pope Paul

II., he devoted himself to architecture at Florence and Mantua, and died at Rome in 1472.

The excellent VESPASIANO DA BISTICCI (1421–98), almost alone among his literary contemporaries, followed a trade, being a bookseller at Florence. He formed the great library of the first Duke of Urbino, and has left particulars of his zeal in the preparation of illuminated manuscripts, and a vigorous expression of his disesteem for printed books in comparison with them. We are indebted to him for no fewer than 105 biographies of contemporaries, most of whom were personally known to him. A few, of considerable length and elaboration, record the lives of popes, kings, and cardinals; the great majority are brief and simple notices of scholars and literary men, some of whom, but for Bisticci, would be almost unknown. All are charming from their unaffected simplicity and geniality, and the curious traits of the age which they preserve.

Had GIOVANNI PONTANO (1426–1503) written in the vernacular, he would have won a place equal to any contemporary's as a poet, and a place among prose-writers entirely his own. Though a statesman and diplomatist, the confidant of the King of Naples, a philologist beside, and the life and soul of the Neapolitan Academy, he is none the less the Lucian and the Martial of his age; the lively satirist and delineator of popular manners in his dialogues; in his verse a genuine lyrist, careful of form as a Greek, animated and eager as if he had been a born Neapolitan. His prose and verse palpitate with feeling, and he gains life at the expense of Latinity. His historical writings, though respectable, are of less mark; but as a popular poet and satirist, Italian speech had an infinite loss in him. Even as it is, he

seems but one remove from a vernacular author. His dialogues had probably much influence upon Erasmus. Another contemporary figure is strange and enigmatical. We know but imperfectly who FRANCESCO COLONNA, the author of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, was, and can only guess why he composed his visionary romance in a macaronic jargon neither Latin nor Italian. The book describes a vision in which Polifilo, after viewing magnificent processions and going through various adventures, ultimately obtains the hand of his lady, Polia, who has been identified with Lucrezia Lello, daughter of a jurisconsult at Treviso. It is barely readable, and yet its very inarticulateness gives it a charm which it would not have possessed if the author had been another Boccaccio. The soul of the Renaissance seems to have passed into it, and to be dumbly yearning for a manifestation never found, "moving apart in worlds not realised." The impression is greatly assisted by the unique illustrations to which it owes its preciousness in artistic eyes, and whose origin is still an unsolved problem. Their lavish fancy and skill in rendering every variety of expression by mere outline are apparent to all; but behind these technical qualities lies the suggestion of a romantic and far-away world, comparable to the Hades adumbrated in the tender farewells on Greek sepulchral reliefs.

On the whole the literary harvest of the century following the death of Petrarch was poor, and the seed dispersed by him and Boccaccio seemed to have fallen upon barren ground. It was not, however, entirely thus: some of the Latin poets, such as Baptista Mantuanus, Campanus, Augurellus, whom we have been compelled to pass without special notice, might have won durable renown

if they had written in Italian; and though there is little achievement in vernacular literature, several branches of human activity are for the first time in modern Europe brought under literary influence. The dearth of literary genius was paralleled by an equal paucity of statesmen and warriors of real greatness, though a Ziska or a Sforza appears here and there. Some mysterious cause had depressed the intellectual vitality of the age, which, nevertheless, continued to progress in social refinement and in opulence. Its æsthetic sensitiveness was chiefly expressed in the rapid development of pictorial and plastic art, and the renovation of architecture; its literary ideal was mainly manifested by the philological and critical apostles of the Renaissance, a remarkable band, who must find place in another chapter. As was to be expected under such circumstances, one of the features of the time was the improvement of the old universities and the formation of private societies of scholars, which expressed Italian intellectual needs as clearly as the foundation of the Royal Society expressed English needs at a later date. Two achieved special celebrity — the Roman Academy, persecuted by Pope Paul II. for its relapse into paganism, and the Platonic Academy at Florence, cherished by the Medici. It fell to the lot of the latter to solemnly decide, under the auspices of Lorenzo de' Medici, that the Italian language actually was on a par with the Latin, and that a man of wit or learning need not fear to lose caste by writing in it.

CHAPTER IX

THE POETICAL RENAISSANCE OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

In characterising the original authors, apart from critics and commentators, whom Italy produced during the first half of the fifteenth century, we have omitted the men who really exerted the most important influence upon literature. These form a group by themselves—not one of Italian authors, for they rarely wrote in the vernacular; scarcely one of authors at all, for they worked chiefly as philologers. They are, however, much too important to be passed over without notice, representing as they did the Renaissance in its aspect as the rebirth of free thought and inquiry, a resurrection no less momentous than the revival of art and letters, and preparing the literary development which they were unable to effect. Few of them were men of extraordinary mental power, but all were passionate for the study of antiquity, and while, perhaps, intending to restore Latin to its rank as the sole literary language, set forces at work which deprived it of this primacy for ever. Even though Lorenzo de' Medici might apologise for writing in a language condemned by men of good judgment, and Varchi's schoolmaster might punish him for reading Petrarch, when men like Alberti took to cultivating the vernacular speech in emulation of

the Latin, it was clear that the latter had already lost its monopoly.

The humanists had nevertheless in their own domain the great advantage of being first in the field. They could hardly advance in any direction without initiating some movement momentous in its effect upon culture. Emanuel Chrysoloras brought the Greek language to Florence; his son-in-law, Filelfo, voyaged to Constantinople, and returned with a Greek library. Poggio Bracciolini, a most elegant Latinist and epistolographer —unfortunately best remembered by his virulent invectives, and by a book of facetiæ which does more credit to his gaiety than to his morals—rendered the greatest service by his assiduity in the collection of manuscripts. Leonardo Bruni accomplished even more by the simple step of making accurate translations of Plato and Aristotle, and thus delivering Western science from bondage to the Arabians, through whose paraphrases these writings had hitherto been chiefly known. Lorenzo Valla, an acute and intrepid critic and original thinker, enthusiastic for truth in the abstract, but not generally actuated by high principle, became the father of modern negative criticism by his overthrow of the scandalous Papal imposture of the Donation of Constantine. Gemistus Pletho, though a visionary, introduced Plato to Italy, and powerfully stimulated thought through the controversies aroused by his writings. Flavio Biondo was the first scientific archæologist, describing the monuments of pagan and Christian Rome, and investigating the topography of ancient Italy. Vittorino da Feltre showed practically by his school at Mantua what education ought to be, and Vespasiano da Bisticci wrote the lives of his fellows. Even men like Filelfo, whose restless pens pro-

duced no work of real importance, kept the intellectual life alert by their incessant activity. For the time the age found what it needed in such men, and scholars enjoyed the consideration awarded to poets under Augustus, rhetoricians in the later Roman Empire, jurists under Justinian, and the founders of religious orders in the days of St. Dominic and St. Francis.

The deference shown to scholars is sufficiently attested by the honourable offices conferred upon them, the competition of princes and republics to obtain the most distinguished Latinists for their secretaries, and the throngs that attended their lectures and other public displays, vapid and empty as these frequently appear to us. The prevailing current of taste proved highly advantageous in raising the standard of university education. Bologna, in a former age the herald of Italian academic culture, latterly in a condition of decay, revived and asserted her supremacy, and her sister seats of learning competed vigorously with her and each other. The triumph of humanism seemed complete when in 1447 erudition made a Pope in the person of Nicholas V., the founder of the Vatican Library, whose love of erudition was such that it absolved in his eyes even Lorenzo Valla's exposure of pious frauds. Two great events favourable to culture succeeded—the fall of Constantinople, which brought a fresh flight of learned Greeks into Europe; and the invention of printing, of which, however, Italy did not reap the benefit until 1464. The tardiness of so simple an invention, upon the verge of which antiquity had continually been hovering, is one of the most surprising facts in the history of the human mind; the indifference with which it was at first received is hardly less so; and the stimulus it imparted to literature long

fell below reasonable expectation. It is remarkable, however, that two complete versions of the Bible appeared at Venice in 1471, and significant that no vernacular Bible was allowed to be printed anywhere else. The general character of the productions of the Italian press is distinctly academical and utilitarian. Classics and classical commentaries, theology, canon and civil law, medicine, form the staple; imaginative vernacular literature, even of the past, is scanty; contemporary literature might hardly have existed so far as the early records of the press indicate. Apart from the studies which conduced to a livelihood, the period all over Europe was one of intellectual barrenness. But young men of lively genius were growing up, and one of these was in a position to be as serviceable to modern belles-lettres as Nicholas V. had been to the study of antiquity.

It rarely happens that Augustus is also Virgil; enough if he is also Mæcenas. LORENZO DE' MEDICI (1448–92) united all these characters. A prince by position if not by descent, he was not only a patron of literature, but a highly intelligent and discriminating patron; nor only a favourer, but himself the producer of some of the best literature of his day. In character, in circumstances, in the bent of his policy and the general result of his activity, he might not unfairly be termed a miniature Augustus; like him he confiscated the liberties of his country as the sole alternative to anarchy, and repaid her by prosperity and peace. All the great qualities of Augustus were his, and few of the defects which history chiefly censures in his prototype. Both were stronger in the self-regarding than in the self-forgetting virtues, but Lorenzo once rose to heroism. History records no action of Augustus comparable to Lorenzo's placing him-

self in the power of the treacherous and unscrupulous King of Naples for the sake of his country. Nor had Lorenzo, like Augustus, ever occasion to pass the sponge over an abortive tragedy. His compositions are of different degrees of merit, but all are fluent and graceful.

We have entered a different period from that of the Uberti and Frezzi; the tree of poetry, so long stiff and dry, now swells with sap, and buds with the prophecy of a coming summer. Two distinct impulses are observable in Lorenzo and his literary mate, Politian: in one point of view the artistic, in the other the poetical spirit predominates. As artists, they strove successfully to attain perfect elegance of expression, and to improve the metrical forms which had descended from the fourteenth century. As poets, they seized upon the songs and catches current in the mouths of the people, and elevated them by judicious treatment into the region of art. This could be possible only to men of great poetic sensitiveness. Had Lorenzo and Politian been less refined by culture, had the one been no scholar and the other no prince, either might have been an Italian Burns; as it is, their work as lyric poets is more nearly comparable to Goethe's. They made the popular Muse acceptable to men of breeding, while gratifying their own tastes by work marked with the stamp of study and erudition, and yet not beyond the intelligence of the average educated man.

Lorenzo's part as the patron of art and letters is so considerable, that his writings, important as they are, appear almost insignificant in comparison. The most elaborate of his poems might be classed as idylls. They comprise the *Ambra*, a graceful and fanciful Ovidian allegory on the metamorphosis of the nymph Ambra into

a rock to escape the pursuit of a river-god; *La Caccia col Falcone*, a lively description of this aristocratic sport; and *La Nencia di Barberino*, no less vivid in its portraiture of the humours of plebeian love-making. Lorenzo's own love poetry consists chiefly of canzoni, more remarkable for elegance than depth of feeling, but perfectly in the character of a man of pleasure who is also a refined gentleman. The spirituality of Dante and his contemporaries, the romantic passion of Petrarch, no longer suited the age. The temple of Love, like the temple of the Church, had been secularised; in everything men habitually lived at a lower level. Yet this declension is compensated in a great degree by the enhanced feeling of reality: there can be no such controversy over Lorenzo's innamorata as over Beatrice and Laura. The following is a fair example of his erotic style:

> "*Thy beauty, gentle Violet, was born*
> *Where for the look of Love I first was fain,*
> *And my bright stream of bitter tears was rain*
> *That beauty to accomplish and adorn.*
> *And such desire was from compassion born,*
> *That from the happy nook where thou wert lain*
> *The fair hand gathered thee, and not in vain,*
> *For by my own it willed thee to be borne.*
> *And, as to me appears, thou wouldst return*
> *Once more to that fair hand, whence thee upon*
> *My naked breast I have securely set:*
> *The naked breast that doth desire and burn,*
> *And holds thee in her heart's place, that hath gone*
> *To dwell where thou wert late, my Violet.*"

If there is more gallantry than passion in compositions of this nature, they show at least that the lute of Love had received a new string since the time of the troubadours.

Love of a sensuous kind is a chief ingredient in Lorenzo's *Canti Carnascialeschi*, which are sometimes highly licentious. He is accused of having composed them with a special view of diverting the minds of the young Florentines from politics; but it seems unnecessary to go beyond the temptation to licence afforded by the general relaxation of the carnival. The gay and the serious Lorenzo were very different people, as remarked by that acute observer Machiavelli. His epistle to his own son Giovanni, afterwards Leo X., on his elevation to the Cardinalate at fourteen, is a model of wisdom and right feeling. His spiritual poems, *Laudi*, moreover, frequently speak the language of true religious emotion.

Lorenzo's court, as is universally known, was the chosen abode of artists and men of letters. A twin star with Lorenzo himself, but even brighter in his literary aspect was ANGELO AMBROGINI (1454–92), known as POLIZIANO from his birth at Montepulciano. Politian, the most brilliant classical scholar of his age, was perhaps the first professed philologist whose scholarship was entirely divested of pedantry. With him classical studies were a vivifying influence, pervading and adorning his literary exercises in the vernacular, but implying no disparagement of the latter. There is little to choose between his Latin and his Italian poetry: the same poetic spirit inspires both, and each is an exemplar of the charm of a choice, yet not too ornate diction. He was accused of writing his Latin verses "with more heat than art"; but this is only another way of saying that while composing them he felt as an ancient, and might very well be taken for a poet of the Silver Age. His lyric tragedy or opera, *Orfeo*, will be treated along with the Italian drama, of which it was the first meritorious

example. His *Giostra*, a poem on the tournament exhibited by Lorenzo's brother Giuliano in 1475, and incidentally introducing its hero's passion for the lovely Simonetta, remained unfinished in consequence of Giuliano's untimely death. It is full of beauties, and is memorable in Italian poetry as the first example of the thoroughly successful employment of the octave stanza. Boccaccio had been too diffuse ; but Politian exemplified the perfect fitness of this form for the combination of narrative poetry with an inexhaustible succession of verbal felicities, many of which, indeed, are appropriated from earlier poets, but all, old and new, seem fused into a glowing whole by the passion for classic form and sensuous beauty. But Politian and his successors did not emulate the classical poets' accurate delineation of Nature. The materials of their descriptions are drawn from storehouses to which every scholar has a key. They bespeak reading and memory rather than actual observation.

This, in Miss Ellen Clerke's version, is Politian's rendering of the vision of perpetual Spring, first seen by Homer, after him by Lucretius, and in our time by Tennyson. Like Ariosto and Tasso, he places his enchanted garden on earth.

> "*A fair hill doth the Cyprian breezes woo,*
> *And sevenfold stream of mighty Nilus see,*
> *When the horizon reddeneth anew ;*
> *But mortal foot may not there planted be.*
> *A green knoll on its slope doth rise to view,*
> *A sunny meadow sheltering in its lee,*
> *Where, wantoning 'mid flowers, each gale that passes*
> *Sets lightly quivering the verdant grasses.*
>
> *A wall of gold its furthest edge doth screen,*
> *Where lies a vale with shady trees set fair,*

Upon whose branches, 'mid leaves newly green,
The quiring birds chant love songs on the air.
The grateful sound of waters chimes between,
By twin streams cool and lucid shed forth there,
In the wave sweet and bitter of whose river
Love whets the golden arrows of his quiver.

Nor the perennial garden's foliage green
Doth snow new-fallen blanch, or rime-frost hoar.
No vernal blight dare come these walls between.
No gale the grass and shrubs e'er ruffles o'er.
Nor is the year in fourfold season seen;
But joyous Spring here reigns for evermore,
Shakes to the breeze her blonde and rippling tresses,
And weaves her wreath of flowers as on she presses."

In Politian's own eyes and those of his contemporaries his achievement as a poet was less important than his labour as a classical scholar. Nor, as respected the needs and interests of his contemporaries, was this judgment wholly mistaken. "Knowledge in that age," says Symonds, "was the pearl of great price; not the knowledge of righteousness, not the knowledge of Nature and her laws, but the knowledge of the wonderful life which throbbed in ancient peoples, and which might make this old world young again." Politian's chief merits as a classical scholar were to have known how to excite a living interest in antiquity, and to have been the first to attempt a scientific classification of MSS. His translations from the Greek were admirable. So long as Lorenzo presided over Florence, Politian's lot, though embittered by some violent literary controversies, had been brilliant and prosperous: his patron's death exposed him to the general unpopularity of the supporters of Lorenzo's incapable successor, the French invader stood at the doors, Savonarola's followers began

to assail culture in its representatives, and within little more than two years Politian escaped the gathering storm either by a broken heart or a voluntary death.

To appreciate Politian's services in imparting literary form to popular poetry, it will be necessary to bestow a glance on this poetry as it existed in Tuscany in his day, and in a measure exists still. We have previously remarked upon the absence of national ballad poetry at a very early period; and when at length we find traces of popular song, little resembling *Chevy Chase* is to be discovered, the staple being carols and love catches. Some of these may be as old as the thirteenth century, and the mass continued augmenting as one anonymous singer after another added something sufficiently attractive to be propagated from hamlet to hamlet, and treasured in the memory.

Similar lyrical production went on over most parts of Italy; the Sicilian songs, after the Tuscan, being the most numerous, or at least the best preserved. These ditties fall generally into two divisions, *rispetti* and *stornelli:* the former consisting of four or six verses rhyming alternately, followed by a couplet; the latter of three lines only, the last rhyming with the first. These soon developed into the *madrigal*, a form affected by persons of culture and professional musicians, but the people continued to carol as of old. Thus, spontaneous births of the instinct for love and song, undergoing countless modifications in passing from mouth to mouth, until the right form has been found at last, and sifted by the taste of generation after generation, these little songs have formed a really beautiful collection of verse, reflecting in their ardour, graceful fancy and purity of sentiment, the best characteristics

of the race from which they sprung. How good they are may be seen from a few of the specimens so admirably rendered by John Addington Symonds :[1]—

"*The moon has risen her plaint to lay*
Before the face of Love Divine;
Saying in heaven she will not stay,
Since you have stolen what made her shine.
Aloud she wails with sorrow wan;—
She told her stars, and two are gone:
They are not there; ye have them now;
They are the eyes in your bright brow.

Think it no grief that I am brown;
For all brunettes are born to reign:
White is the snow, yet trodden down;
Black pepper, kings do not disdain:
White snow lies mounded in the vales;
Black pepper's weighed in brazen scales.

O Swallow, Swallow, flying through the air,
Turn, turn, I prithee, from thy flight above.
Give me one feather from thy wing so fair,
For I will write a letter to my love.
When I have written it and made it clear,
I'll give thee back thy feather, Swallow dear;
When I have written it on paper white,
I'll make, I swear, thy missing feather right;
When once 'tis written on fair leaves of gold,
I'll give thee back thy wings and flight so bold."

Two other leading poetical figures of the fifteenth century, Matteo Maria Boiardo and Luigi Pulci, authors of the *Orlando Innamorato* and the *Morgante Maggiore*, will be best treated along with the writers of chivalrous

[1] The best collection of popular Italian belletristic literature is the *Canti e Racconti del Popolo Italiano*, in eight volumes, edited by E. Comparetti and A. D'Ancona.

romance in epic form. It is not quite clear how far Pulci had a share in the poems ascribed to his elder brother Luca (1431–70); but the latter's verses on Giuliano de' Medici, his crusading epic, *Ciriffo Calvaneo*, and his pastoral, *Driadeo*, undoubtedly owe much to Luigi. The heroic epistles in verse which pass under his name are no doubt by him. Another poet, GIROLAMO BENIVIENI, shines amid the Platonic circle of Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola. His verses might have given him no inconsiderable distinction if he could have attained to lucidity of diction; but his powers of expression are inadequate to the abstruseness of his themes. He does best when his idealism is embodied in an objective shape, as in the following sonnet, clearly suggested by the first in the *Vita Nuova*:

"*In utmost height of Heaven I saw the choir*
Of happy stars in their infinity
Attending on the Sun obediently,
And he was pasturing them with his own fire.
And, wealthy with my spoil, I saw Desire
Unstring his bow and lay his arrows by,
And proffer Heaven, with all humility,
My heart, which golden drapery did attire.
And, of this disarrayed, not half so fair
Smiles Earth to Sun when by his crescent light
The ivory horn of vernal Bull is smit
As in this glory did my heart appear,
Which now my mortal breast doth scorn and slight,
Abandoning, nor will return to it."

The Italian writings of Benivieni's friend Savonarola are chiefly theological. Their fervour gained them great influence at the time, but the celebrity which they still enjoy is due rather to the fame of the writer than to their literary qualities. Savonarola nevertheless affected

the literature of his day, partly by his war against classical and Renaissance culture, and partly by the impulse which he gave to the pamphlet, precursor of the newspaper press. Cristoforo Landino's Camaldolese Dialogues would have been important contributions to the national literature if they had been written in Italian.

The first writer of prose who presents us with a perfect example from which the new period may be dated is JACOPO SANNAZARO, as much as Politian the nursling of a court; to whom we are also indebted for the first example of the pastoral romance, and the first proof that excellent Italian prose could be written outside Tuscany. Sannazaro, born in 1458, was a Neapolitan of Spanish descent, as it is said, and the statement seems to be corroborated by the peculiar independence and dignity of character which distinguish him from the supple literati of his time. Even Pontano, whose obligations to the royal house of Naples were so extreme, played an ambiguous part upon the ephemeral French conquest of 1495. Sannazaro's loyalty not only sustained that brief ordeal, but when four years later the cause of the Neapolitan dynasty was irrevocably lost, he accompanied his fallen master to France, and spent several years in exile. Returning to Naples, he inhabited a beautiful villa at Mergellina, and devoted himself to the poetry of which we shall have to speak in another place. After witnessing the destruction of his retreat in the French war (1528), he died in 1530 in the house of Cassandra, Marchesa Castriota, whom he had vainly defended against her husband's attempt to repudiate her. Few of his contemporaries deserve equal respect as a man; and although as a writer but of the second rank, it was granted to him, alike in prose and verse, to mark

an era in literature signalising the triumph of Petrarch and Boccaccio over the pedantry of the fifteenth century, but at the same time the deliberate preference of form to matter, and the discouragement of irregular originality.

Sannazaro's *Arcadia*, historically the most important of his writings, is comparatively a youthful performance, having been substantially completed by 1489, though not published in a correct edition until 1504. It would in any case mark an epoch as the first perfect example of the pastoral romance, which Boccaccio had foreshadowed in his *Ameto*, but which Sannazaro enriched by elements derived from Theocritus and Virgil. His landscape and personages are entirely classical; the shepherds contend with each other in song precisely as in the Greek and Latin eclogues, and no attempt is made to represent rustic manners as they really are. The descriptions, whether of nature or of humanity, on the other hand, are graceful and vivid, and informed by a most poetical sentiment; and it may be said that Sannazaro's work would be more esteemed at this day if it had had fewer imitators. The style admits of but little variety, and pastoral fiction easily became insipid in the hands of a succession of followers who did not, like Shakespeare in the *Winter's Tale*, resort to Nature for their delineations. Sannazaro himself is not exempt from the charge of monotony. More serious defects, however, are those of excessive Latinisation in the construction of sentences, and rhetorical exaggeration, arising from his too close adherence to the immature style of Boccaccio's early writings, instead of the simple elegance of the *Decameron*. The resolution to achieve poetry in prose at any cost, causes a crabbed involution and overloads the diction

with adjectives; while there is yet enough of true feeling to overcome even the wearisomeness of the perpetual laments of the shepherds over the unparalleled cruelty of their innamoratas. Sannazaro had a mistress to whose memory he remained faithful all his life, and most of his fictitious characters veil actual personages. When this is understood, the romance loses its apparent artificiality; and Settembrini's remark is justified, "*Anche oggi si sente una dolcezza d' affetto a leggere quel libro.*"

The main literary interest, however, of the *Arcadia* is that it marks an epoch and carries the reform which Lorenzo de' Medici and Politian had initiated in verse into the domain of prose. It is perhaps the sole Italian prose composition of the fifteenth century which can be said to wear a classic stamp; and being received with enthusiasm and read by all, it fixed a standard which subsequent writers were compelled to maintain. It prescribed the rule for pastoral romance in all languages: not only did Sidney borrow its spirit and many of its episodes as well as its name for his own work, more, however, of a romance and less of a pastoral than Sannazaro's; not only did the two great Portuguese pastoralists, Bernardim Ribeiro and Montemayor, model themselves upon it; but Shakespeare took from it the name of Ophelia, and traces of it may be found, not only in the pastoral part of Keats's *Endymion*, but even in his *Hyperion*.

By Sannazaro's time, then, it may be said that Italian literature was fairly despatched on the route which it was to follow throughout the golden Cinque Cento. Elegance, finish, polish were to be the chief aims; form was to be esteemed at least on a par with matter; the mediæval elements, as we find them in Dante, were to

be kept in abeyance. The classical tradition was to be taken up, and Italy was to appear as the literary heiress of Rome; but not to the extent of corrupting her own language with Latinisms. Such a tacit resolution was admirable for raising and maintaining the standard of literary composition, but was hostile to the development of transcendent genius.

CHAPTER X

CHIVALRIC POETRY

THE history of the Italian chivalric epic is one of the most interesting departments of the story of literature, both on its own account, and because it reveals as in a mirror the growth of the more important epic of the tale of Troy. It arose out of a real event of the deepest importance to Europe, but this it so disfigured by romance and imagination as to be hardly recognisable. Charles Martel, the deliverer of France from the Saracens, is confounded with another and still more illustrious Charles, whose relations with the Saracen monarchs were usually amicable; and, by what seems to be a universal law, this hero comes to occupy but a corner of the temple nominally dedicated to him, and his renown is transferred to creatures of pure imagination. As Agamemnon, who at all events personifies the most powerful state of primitive Greece, yields as a poetic hero to such historically subordinate, if not absolutely fictitious personages as Achilles and Ulysses; as the terrible Attila, the portent of his time, shrinks in the Nibelungen Lied into the insignificant figure of Etzel; so, in the romancer's eye, the real glories of Charlemagne dwindle to nothing before the petty skirmish of Roncesvalles.

In all these instances, and equally so in the cycle of Arthur, a germ of historical reality lies latent in the

human consciousness for centuries, and then suddenly becomes prolific of a wealth of imaginative detail. There can be no reasonable doubt that the writers of the Homeric epics, whether few or many, stood in the same relation to their sources as Malory and Boiardo to theirs, inheritors of a tradition in which they reposed genuine belief, but which at the same time they thought themselves at liberty to embellish and diversify as they deemed best. We should probably find the resemblance between the development of Trojan and of Arthurian legend to be very close, had we the same acquaintance with the intellectual history of ancient Greece as we possess with that of the mediæval period. Both were the result of a great poetical revival, when the awakening spirit grasped eagerly at the nutriment nearest to hand; and the Celtic romancers of the twelfth century were inspired by true Celtic yearnings for an irrevocable past, finding much of their material in the national historian, Geoffrey of Monmouth.

With the Italian romantic epic the case was somewhat different: it was largely influenced by a single book, and one composed with a direct polemical purpose. The fear and hatred entertained in the tenth and eleventh centuries for the Saracen invaders and the Danes, and other heathens frequently confounded with them, found expression at last in a remarkable book, the Latin Chronicles attributed to Turpin, Archbishop of Rheims in the eighth century, but really a fabrication of the eleventh, in which Charlemagne and his paladins were idealised as the vanquishers of the pagans. From the prominent position given to Charlemagne's imaginary Spanish expeditions, the author is thought to have been a Spaniard, and he owed much to that "Iliad of the

Middle Ages," the *Song of Roland*, also a production of the eleventh century. The panic passed away, but left behind it a rich deposit of romantic fiction, deriving a beauty unknown to former ages from the high estimate of woman which Christianity and Teutonic feeling had jointly contributed to the collective human consciousness. Utilised in many French narrative poems, this chivalric element first appeared in Italian in the elaborate prose-romance, *I Reali di Francia*. From this the step to metrical epic was easy, but the awkwardness of the Italian poets' first attempts seems to indicate that it was not taken until the poetic art had reached its period of deepest depression in the early part of the fifteenth century, when the rude and tedious epics *Buovo di Antona* (Bevis of Hampton), *La Spagna*, *Febus*, and *Queen Ancronja* were probably composed.

Another epic of the same period, without a name, recently discovered, is to a considerable extent the groundwork of the *Morgante Maggiore*[1] of LUIGI PULCI (1432–87), a humorous poem with a serious purpose, or, at least, unconsciously expressing some of the most serious phenomena of the age. Its mixture of sincere religious feeling and genuine humanity with the most irreverent buffoonery has made it the stumbling-block of critics and literary historians, whose interpretation of its tendencies and estimate of its author's character are usually determined by their own prepossessions. While it is impossible to deny that Morgante's companion, the epicurean gourmand Margutte,[2] is the author's

[1] Morgante is the name of a giant converted to Christianity by Orlando. He dies in the middle of the poem.

[2] The evident Greek derivation of this name from *margos* (gluttonous) lends some countenance to the suspicion that Politian had a hand in Pulci's poem.

special creation, and the object of his chief predilection among his characters, other portions of the poem are couched in so lofty a strain, that he has been supposed to have had assistance from no less a philosopher than Ficino and no less a poet than Politian. Sarcastic sallies at the expense of the popular theology alternate with set passages of fervent orthodoxy. To us the *Morgante* appears a symbol of the intellectual anarchy then prevalent among the most intelligent Italians, among whom the religious sentiment survived, while its external vesture had become mere mythology; who had neither, like Benivieni, fallen under the influence of Savonarola, nor were disqualified by lack of classical culture from participating in the humanistic revival. Pulci's opinions are probably expressed by Astaroth, a devil introduced to aid the paladins and talk divinity, and whose discourse contains a marvellous foreshadowing of the discovery of America.

There can, nevertheless, be no question that the frivolous and mocking element in the *Morgante* is the source of its celebrity and literary importance. It is the first really great modern example of burlesque poetry, and there are few literatures without traces of its influence. In our own, it was the father of Frere's *Whistlecraft*, which was the father of *Beppo* and the *Vision of Judgment*, the first stanza of which latter poem inverts an idea of Pulci's; and Byron accompanied these masterpieces by a translation of Pulci's first canto, upon which he himself set a special value. It has been contended that Shakespeare was acquainted with Pulci, and certainly Panizzi's portrait of the vindictive traitor Gano in the *Morgante* might almost serve for one of Iago, while Orlando's unsuspecting magnanimity resembles Othello's. Panizzi

justly praises the truth and dignity of the characters of Orlando and Rinaldo, and says of the general economy of the poem : " Pulci was the first who wrote a long and complicated poem which, diversified as it is by many incidents, has a principal subject and a principal character, on which all other parts and personages depend, without which the poem could not subsist, and which by itself alone forms an uninterrupted narrative. This hero and this subject are Gano and his treachery, which brings on the defeat of Roncesvalles."

These are great merits. The principal defects are summed up by a genial admirer, Leigh Hunt (*Stories from the Italian Poets*, vol. i.), as the want of fine imagery and natural description, and frequent triviality and prolixity. The vulgarity objected to by the Italian critics must exist, but is not equally offensive to a foreigner. The poem is fully analysed by Panizzi in the first volume of his edition of Boiardo, and its general character may be very well caught from Byron's translation of the first canto. Pulci's higher strain is ably conveyed in the following portion of a translation of an episode by Lady Dacre :

> "*And because Love not willingly excuses*
> *One who is loved and loveth not again;*
> *(For tyrannous were deemed the rule he uses,*
> *Should they who sue for pity sue in vain;*
> *What gracious lord his faithful liege refuses?)*
> *So when the gentle dame perceived the pain*
> *That well-nigh wrought to death her valiant knight,*
> *Her melting heart began his love requite.*
>
> *And from her eyes soft beamed the answering ray*
> *That Oliver's soul-thrilling glance returns;*
> *Love in these gleamy lightnings loves to play*
> *Till but one flame two youthful bosoms burns.*

To tend his grievous wounds she comes one day,
And towards him with greeting mute she turns;
For on her lips her voiceless words are stayed,
And her bright eyes are fain to lend their aid.

When Oliver perceived that Forisene
Accosted him with shrinking, timid grace,
The pains which insupportable had been,
Vanished, and to far other ills gave place:
His soul is tost sweet hopes and doubts between,
And you might almost 'mid these flutterings trace
A dear assurance to be loved by her;
For silence is Love's best interpreter."

Not much is known of Pulci's life except that he was the intimate friend, correspondent, and confidential agent of Lorenzo de' Medici, and is said to have composed his poem at the request of Lorenzo's mother, whom he celebrated after her death. The disposition of his contemporaries to attribute the finest portions of his poem to Ficino and Politian may indicate some failure on his part to sustain the poetical character in his daily walk and conversation; while the more serious passages of his poetry, especially the noble pathos of the death of Orlando, disclose an elevated soul. Orlando, standing alone among his slaughtered friends on the battlefield of Roncesvalles, is visited by the angel Gabriel, who offers him a new army, and promises that earth and sea shall tremble at his name. But Orlando prefers to follow those who are gone. The *Morgante* was not printed till the year after Pulci's death. His minor works include a poem of humble life, in imitation of Lorenzo's *Nencia*, and a series of polemical sonnets against Matteo Franco, who was equally dyslogistic on his own part. Neither poet need be taken very seriously.

The year preceding the appearance of the *Morgante* (1486) saw the posthumous publication of the first part of another poem, which, from some points of view, is entitled to rank at the very head of romantic poetry. This is the *Orlando Innamorato* of MATTEO MARIA BOIARDO, Count of Scandiano. Little is known of his life except its simple and noble outline. He was born at his family seat of Scandiano, near Reggio, in the Modenese, about 1434. Like his successors, Ariosto and Tasso, he was a favourite at the court of the Duke of Ferrara, his sovereign. He celebrated Antonia Caprara in his lyrics, and bestowed his hand upon Taddea Novellara. In his later years he was successively governor of Modena and Reggio. In his disposition he was most generous, and too clement for his arduous public duties. He composed Latin poetry, and translated several classical and other authors; and died in 1494, on the eve of the invasion of Charles VIII., prophetically bewailing the consequent ruin of Italy at the end of his unfinished *Orlando Innamorato*, which he is supposed to have begun about 1472. The greater part of this poem had been published in 1486, the continuation is said to have appeared in 1495, but the edition of 1506 is the earliest now extant.

Although Orlando and Rinaldo are the heroes, the story of Boiardo's poem is original. "*Turpino istesso la nascose*," he says. It is exceedingly graceful and ingenious. Argalia and his sister Angelica, the children of the King of Cathay, present themselves at Charlemagne's court. The former has an enchanted lance, by the virtue of which he might have overthrown all Charles's paladins; but the pig-headed Saracen Feraù persists, like Monsieur Jourdain's servant, in thrusting tierce when he ought to thrust quarte, and Argalia is glad to make his escape,

leaving the lance behind him. It falls into the hands of Astolfo, the English knight, not hitherto especially distinguished in battle or tourney, but who at least possesses his countrymen's characteristic of not knowing when they are beaten.

> "*Solea dir, ch' egli era per sciagura,*
> *E tornava a cader senza paura.*"

By means of this lance Astolfo performs the most signal exploits, delivering Charles from the invasion of Gradasso, King of Sericana, who makes war upon him to obtain Rinaldo's steed Bajardo, and Orlando's sword Durindana. Rinaldo and Orlando themselves are absent in pursuit of Angelica, who has returned to her own country. Angelica and Rinaldo are alternately wrought to fondness and antipathy through the spell of enchanted potions supplied by the poet *ad libitum*. Orlando, without obtaining any share of her affections, remains her humble slave. All are involved in a maze of adventures, most cunningly interwoven, replete with the endless delight of inexhaustible invention and the surprise of perpetual novelty. No motto for the poem could be more appropriate than that with which Panizzi prefaces his edition :

> "*Ille per extentum funem mihi posse videtur*
> *Ire poeta, meum qui pectus inaniter angit,*
> *Irritat, mulcet, falsis terroribus implet,*
> *Ut magus, et modo me Thebis, modo ponit Athenis.*"

In spite of the wild and fanciful character of the incidents, a deep interest is excited for the principal personages, who are truly human, except when avowedly of

the *fortisque Gyas fortisque Cloanthus* order, or, as the Italian poet himself has it,

> "*Avino, Avolio, Ottone, e Berlinghiero.*"

In this respect Boiardo has a great advantage over Spenser; his characters are actual people, not mere abstractions, and he is unencumbered with allegory. As a master of poetic language he is greatly inferior. Though both picturesque and tuneful, he is far from rivalling the colour and music of the Englishman. Compared to the *Faerie Queene* his poem is as his own clear-chiming octave to the sonorous magnificence of the Spenserian stanza. In general, his tone is much more easy and familiar than Spenser's; when he chooses, however, his sentiment is more elevated and his pathos more moving. Poetry has few passages at once so nobly heroic and so exquisitely touching as the combat between Orlando and Agricane, epitomised by Leigh Hunt in his *Stories from the Italian Poets*. The pen fell from Boiardo's hand just as he was bringing his errant heroes back to encounter the new invasion of the African king Agramante, and the powerful hand that took it up used it to delay the approaching denouement, and superimpose a new structure upon the original foundation. In every literary quality Ariosto excels Boiardo, but he is a remove further from the realms of chivalry and fairie, and

> "*Never can recapture*
> *The first fine careless rapture.*"

Both are poets of the Renaissance, but Ariosto has more of that aspect of pomp and luxury which estranged

Ruskin, and Boiardo of that half-erudite, half-ignorant naïveté which so fascinates in the pictures of Botticelli and Roselli. The following stanzas, translated by Miss Ellen Clerke, form an excellent specimen of Boiardo's manner in general, and exemplify that delightful blending of classic and romantic feeling only possible in the youth of a literature :

"*In the glade's heart a youth upon the sward,*
All nude, disported him with song and jest;
Three ladies fair, to serve their love and lord,
Danced round him, they, too, nude and all undrest.
Unmeet for sword and shield, for watch and ward,
He seemed, with eyes of brown, and sunny crest.
That yet the dim upon his cheek had sprouted,
By some might be averred, by others doubted.

Of roses, violets, and all blossoms pied,
Full baskets holding, they their merry game
Of love and frolic on the greensward plied,
When Montalbano's Lord upon them came.
'*Behold the traitor!*' *with one voice they cried;*
'*Behold the recreant!*' *did all exclaim.*
'*Him, who all joy contemned of sense enraptured,*
Now in his own despite our snare hath captured.'

And with their baskets, when these words were said,
They on Rinaldo flung themselves amain;
One violets threw, another roses red,
Lilies and hyacinths they strewed like rain;
Each blow unto his heart keen anguish sped,
The marrow of his bones was searched with pain.
With burning aches they sting where'er they settle,
As though of fire were leaf and flower and petal.

The youth who nude had figured on the scene,
When all his basket he had emptied out,
With a tall lily-stem full-branched with green.
Rinaldo on Mambrino's helm did flout.

No help availed that baron bold, I ween,
Felled like a four-year child beneath the clout,
Scarce touched he earth, ere he who thus had mauled him,
Caught by the heels and round the meadow hauled him.

Each of those ladies three a garland wore,
Of roses twined, deep damask or snow-white;
Each from her head its garniture now tore,
Since other weapons failed them for the fight,
And though the knight cried mercy o'er and o'er,
They ceased not, e'en when tired, to scourge and smite,
And dragged him round, and did with blows belabour,
Until the noonday sun shone on their labour.

Nor hauberk stout, nor iron plate of mail,
Those blows could fend, or parry their fierce might;
But all his flesh was bruised with wound and wale,
Beneath his arms, and with such fire alight,
That souls condemned, in the infernal vale,
Must of a surety suffer pains more slight
Than those in which this baron sore did languish,
When like to die of utter fear and anguish.

Nor could he tell if gods or men were those,
Nor prayers availed, nor aught such foes could rout;
And thus continued they, nor took repose,
Till on their shoulders wings began to sprout,
Of white and gold, vermilion blent with rose;
While from each plume a living eye looked out,
Not peacock-orbed, or other fowl's in seeming,
But like a lovely maiden's softly gleaming.

Then straight did they uplift themselves in flight,
And one by one unto high heaven upsoared,
Rinaldo, on the lawn, in doleful plight,
Now left alone, with tears his state deplored,
O'erwhelmed so sore with pain and woe that quite
His senses ebbed away, in grief outpoured;
And in the end such anguish did invade him,
That, as one dead, down on the sward he laid him."

The fastidious refinement of the Italians of the sixteenth century for a time obscured the fame of one of their most delightful authors. We have seen that Boiardo was a native of the district of Reggio; we have also seen that Reggio was among the places which, in the opinion of no less eminent a judge than Dante, were disqualified by their dialect from ever producing a poet. It is no wonder, therefore, that the *Orlando Innamorato* should teem with inelegances of diction, scarcely perceptible to a foreigner, but which seemed most flagrant in an age when priests pocketed their breviaries for fear of contaminating their style. Two other poets independently addressed themselves to the task of making Boiardo presentable. Domenichi, "a literary gentleman by trade," did little good or harm; he neither added nor omitted a stanza, except in the first canto, and as he went on his emendations fell off. Berni, a great writer in his way, of whom much must be said when we treat of comic and familiar poetry, inserted many stanzas of his own, and altered so many throughout as to metamorphose the spirit no less than the diction of the poem. Chivalry and humour are nicely balanced throughout the original; the poet occasionally smiles at the extravagance of his own imaginations, but his irony never broadens into burlesque. In Berni's *rifacimento* the element of humour greatly preponderates, and the elegance and grace of the adulteration make no sufficient amends for the transposition of a noble poem from an heroic into a familiar key. Although his *rifacimento* was not frequently reprinted, it attained such celebrity in literary circles that Boiardo was almost forgotten, and the *Orlando Innamorato* commonly passed under Berni's name. No edition of the

original as Boiardo wrote it was published from 1544 to 1830, when Antonio Panizzi, doubtless stimulated by the circumstance that he himself was born near Reggio,[1] redeemed it from oblivion, and restored it to the place it has ever since maintained as a star of at least the second magnitude in the constellation of Italian epic poetry.

The almost simultaneous appearance of two such poems as the *Morgante* and the *Orlando* by two writers of such social and intellectual distinction as Pulci and Boiardo, indicates that the love of chivalrous fiction must have been very rife in Italy. It is remarkable that the Italian writers should have so rarely essayed the easier path of prose-romance, but this they left to the Spaniards, who on their part, excepting in ballads, in that age rarely ventured upon poetical composition. One only of the Italian romantic epics between Boiardo and Ariosto deserves mention. It is the Mambriano of FRANCESCO BELLO, known as *Il Cieco d'Adria*. The blind bard amused the court of Mantua with recitations which he afterwards stitched together into a long poem devoid of all pretence to epic unity. But, as he himself observes, he thought he had done enough in bringing all the paladins back to Paris, and rendering all the Saracens tributary to the Emperor. His diction is often as unshapen as his story; nevertheless, he is a real poet, and his description of the Temple of Mars in particular will compare not unfavourably with those of Statius, Chaucer, and Boccaccio.

[1] It is curious to note in this connection that Rubiera, the original seat of Boiardo's family, having become a state prison under the modern Dukes of Modena, gave Panizzi the subject for his first publication, known under the abridged title of *I Processi di Rubiera*.

Before parting with the predecessors of Ariosto, a word should be said of Boiardo's minor poems. Besides a comedy, *Timone*, to be noticed hereafter, he wrote numerous canzoni and sonnets. Of these Panizzi justly says: "Boiardo's poetry, although in the manner of Petrarch, has all the marks of originality, and resembles more the character of the predecessors of the Bard of Laura than of his successors. His poetry was not written to be read, but to be sung, and was submitted to those musical as well as metrical laws by which that of Petrarch had been governed. In his day, music was still subject to poetry, and the inanimate instruments were designed to support, not to drown, the human voice." Panizzi, therefore, seems to consider Boiardo the last of the truly melodious lyrists of Italy; though it is just to point out that his remark respecting the predominance of the instrument over the voice did not become applicable until the seventeenth century, and that he elsewhere seems to confine the decay of Italian melody to the two centuries immediately preceding his own time (1830). His edition of Boiardo's lyrics is almost inaccessible; but he has quoted enough in his memoir of the author to confirm his favourable judgment of their literary qualities.

CHAPTER XI

ARIOSTO AND HIS IMITATORS

BOIARDO had accomplished a great work. He had raised the old chivalric romance to epic dignity, and shown its capability of classic form. This, impeded by his provincial education and the low standard of poetry prevailing in his time, he had not himself been able to impart. The achievement was reserved for one who has infinitely transcended him in reputation, though it may be questioned whether he has indeed greatly surpassed him in any respect but style and the gift of story-telling, and who is certainly inferior to him in sincerity and simplicity.

LODOVICO ARIOSTO was born at Reggio, near which town Boiardo also had first seen the light, on September 8, 1474. His family was noble, and his father, who survived his birth about twenty years, filled many important offices. Like the fathers of Petrarch and Boccaccio, he insisted that his son should follow the profession of the law, which the youth renounced after five years of fruitless, perhaps not very persevering study. His father's death left Ariosto at the head of a large family, for which he had to provide out of a scanty patrimony. He solaced his cares by classical studies, which made him a fair Latin poet. About 1503 he entered the service of the Cardinal of Este, brother of the Duke of

Ferrara, and hence a member of that house whose glory it has been to have numbered two of the most illustrious poets of Italy in its train, and whose infelicity to have derived more obloquy than honour from the connection. Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* had been designed for the glorification of the house of Este, but the purpose is not sufficiently obtrusive to spoil our pleasure in the poet's ideal world. Ariosto took up the thread of the narrative where his predecessor had dropped it, and writing in the spirit of a courtier, produced in the *Orlando Furioso* a sequel related to Boiardo's poem much as Virgil's national epic on the wanderings of Æneas is related to Homer's artless tale of the wanderings of Ulysses.

In so far as Ariosto's objects were poetical fame and the honour of his native country they were attained to the full; but his toil was almost vain as respected recompense from the princes for whose sake he had blemished his poem. The Cardinal, a coarse, unscrupulous man, fitter for a soldier than an ecclesiastic, was apparently unable to discern any connection between Ruggiero's hippogriff and the glories of his descendants, and upon the publication of the *Orlando* in 1510, asked the poet quite simply "where he had been for all that rot?" He is stated, however, to have presented Ariosto with a golden chain, rather for the ornament of his person than the relief of his necessities, as he could not venture to turn it into money. Ariosto further incurred his Eminence's displeasure by hesitating to accompany him on a mission to Hungary, and found it advisable to exchange his service for the Duke's. The Duke, a prince lavish in shows, economical in salaries, thought the poet abundantly rewarded by the governorship of the Garfagnana,

which it was necessary to confer upon somebody. The Garfagnana was a wild district overrun with poetical banditti, readers and admirers of their governor's epic. Here Ariosto gained much honour, but little emolument.

His experience of his patrons generally justified his favourite motto, *Pro bono malum.* Even the munificent Leo X. did nothing for him but kiss him on both cheeks, and remit half the fees upon the brief that assured his copyrights, his particular friend Cardinal Bibbiena pocketing the other. His sole real benefactor was the Marquis del Vasto, husband of the lady whom we shall find celebrated by Luigi Tansillo, who settled an annuity of a hundred ducats upon him. Even this was consideration for value to be received, the Marquis, himself a poet, being properly impressed by the *Vixere fortes ante Agamemnona* maxim. Ariosto acquitted himself of his obligation like a man, comparing his patron to Cæsar, Nestor, Achilles, Nireus, and Ladas. Great as was the renown which his *Orlando* procured for him in his lifetime, its profits were not such as to render him independent of patronage; yet, after all, he was able to boast that the modest house which he built for himself, and where he died in 1533, was paid for by his own money.[1] It is kept to this day by the municipality of Ferrara; and Ariosto's manuscripts, evincing his indefatigable care in the revision of his poem, are preserved in the public library.

The chief literary occupations of his latter years had been the composition of comedies, the superintendence of theatrical performances for the entertainment of the Duke, and the incessant revision of the *Orlando Furioso,*

[1] "*Parva sed apta mihi, sed nulli obnoxia; sed non*
Sordida, parta meo sed tamen aere domus."

enlarged from forty to forty-six cantos. The last edition published under his own inspection appeared in 1532, and was not regarded by him as definitive. He also began a continuation, intended to narrate the death of Ruggiero by the treachery of Gano, of which only five cantos were written.

So great is the variety of the *Orlando Furioso*, that it appears difficult at first to discover a clue to a main action among its thronging and complicated adventures. Ginguené and Panizzi, however, have shown that one exists, and that this is the union of Ruggiero and Bradamante, the fabulous ancestors of the house of Este. All the poet's skill is exerted to keep them apart, that he may bring them together at last. Orlando, Rinaldo, Angelica, the chief personages of the *Innamorato*, have become subordinate characters; and, notwithstanding the title of the poem, Orlando's madness is but an episode. The unfortunate consequence is the transfer of the main interest from personages whom Boiardo had made highly attractive, to Ruggiero and Bradamante, less impressive in the hands of Ariosto, whose forte is rather in depicting tender or humorous than heroic character. It would not be just to say that this occasions the chief disadvantage of the poem in comparison with the *Innamorato*, the loss of the elder poet's delightful naïveté. Rather the change of plan and the falling off in simplicity spring from the same root, the taste and character of the author.

Ariosto was more of a courtier than a knight, and thought more of the house of Este than of the paladins of Charlemagne. He wrought upon Boiardo in the spirit of Dryden adapting Chaucer; while his predecessor, though himself courtly, may rather be likened to

William Morris. Boiardo, though also purposing the panegyric of the house of Este, sings for the delight of singing, and introduces no incongruous fifteenth-century figures into his romantic pageant. Ariosto mars his epic by contemporary allusions, as Spenser and Tennyson marred theirs by far-fetched allegory. It must be remembered, in justice to him, that his perpetual adulation of the court of Ferrara seemed less extravagant then than now. To us the importance attached to a family which would be forgotten if Ariosto and Tasso had not swelled its retinue, and if Lucrezia Borgia had not married into it, borders on the absurd. It seems preposterous that hosts should be equipped, and giants and dragons and enchanters set in motion, and paladins despatched on errands to the moon, that Ariosto may compliment a cardinal whose want of culture rather than his penetration led him to rate these compliments at their worth. But in Ariosto's day that court was a bright and dazzling reality, and almost every member of his immediate circle depended upon it for his bread.

If we can forget his servility, or persuade ourselves to deem it loyalty, we shall find little to censure in Ariosto. Shelley's assertion that he is only sometimes a poet implies a narrow conception of the nature of poetry. Rather may it be said that he is always a poet, always fanciful, always musical, always elevated, though not always to a very great altitude, above the level of the choicest prose. It is true that he has nothing of the seer in his composition, that his perfect technical mastery is rarely either exalted or disturbed by any gleam of the light that never was on sea or land, that his poem is destitute of moral or patriotic purpose, and that his standard in all things is that of his age.

This merely proves that he is not in the rank of supremely great poets—a position which he would not have claimed for himself; nor have his countrymen paralleled him with Dante. He is hardly to be called Homeric, though endowed with the Homeric rapidity, directness, conciseness, and, except when he voluntarily turns to humour and burlesque, much of the Homeric nobility.

Perhaps the nearest literary analogy to the *Orlando Furioso* in another language is the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid. In both poems appear the same perspicuity and facility of narration, the same sweetness of versification, the same art of interweaving episodes into a whole. Ariosto's vigour and directness, nevertheless, are wanting to Ovid, and the palm of invention and of the delineation of character undoubtedly belongs to him, for Ovid was forbidden to introduce a new incident, or vary any of the personages afforded by his mythological repertory. The fact that the *Orlando* is not, like the *Jerusalem*, a new *Æneid*, but a new *Metamorphoses*, entirely justifies the introduction of such burlesque satire as the abode of Discord among the monks, or such delightful extravagance as Astolfo's flight to the moon in quest of Orlando's brains, resulting in the recovery of no inconsiderable portion of his own. Such episodes are, indeed, the most characteristic passages of the *Furioso;* yet in others, such as the siege of Paris and the madness of Orlando, Ariosto shows himself capable of rising to epical dignity, which he could have assumed more frequently if it had entered into his plan. This rather required the gifts of the painter, whether of natural scenery or of human emotion, which he possessed in the most eminent degree; and of the ironic but kindly observer of human life, which he

exhibited so fully that even his descriptions are less popular and admired than the reflective and moralising introductions to his cantos. Never was such wildness of imagination ballasted with such solid good sense. Yet, when all is said, his most distinctive merit remains his unsurpassed talent of exposition, his unfaltering flow of energetic, perspicuous, melodious narrative; excellence apparently spontaneous and unstudied, but in truth due to the strenuous revision of one who judged himself severely, and deemed with Michael Angelo that trifles made perfection, and perfection was no trifle. Mr. Courthope, in an admirable parallel, has pointed out his great superiority as a narrator to his disciple Spenser, whose pictures, nevertheless, glow with deeper and softer tints, and whose voluminous melody fills the ear more perfectly than Ariosto's ringing stanza.

The controversy whether Ariosto or Tasso's poem is the greater epic, as it was one of the most obstinately interminable ever raised by academic pedantry, is also one of the idlest. They belong to different departments of art; it would be as reasonable to compare a picture with a statue. The question, nevertheless, which of the men was the greater poet, does admit of profitable discussion, though it may be difficult to establish any but a subjective criterion. If endowment with the poetical temperament is to be taken as the test, the palm certainly belongs to Tasso, whose actions, thoughts, and misfortunes are invariably those of a poet, and whose inward music is constantly finding expression in lyrical verse. Ariosto's comparatively few lyrics generally wear a less spontaneous aspect than Tasso's; the incidents of his life rather bespeak the man of affairs than the man of books; and if his *Orlando* had perished, we should

hardly have surmised how great a poet had been lost in him.

If, on the other hand, the palm should be bestowed for mastery of art, it seems rather due to Ariosto, who handles his theme with more vigour, and has it more thoroughly under control. He is not obliged, like Tasso, to embellish his poem with episodes which, by their superior attractiveness, almost eclipse the main action: the few passages of the kind in the *Orlando* are strictly subordinate, and not among its principal ornaments. The chief artistic blots upon his poem could not well have been avoided. So completely, though unjustly, has he overshadowed his predecessor Boiardo, that we are apt to forget that his work is an example, unique in literature, of the successful continuation of another's. The adulation of the house of Este was an inheritance from his precursor; it is only to be regretted that, contrary to the example of Boiardo and the subsequent practice of Tasso, he should have given it disproportionate prominence. The incurable defect of the action of the *Furioso* is also a legacy from the *Innamorato*. Ruggiero, the real hero of Ariosto's part of the poem, wins the hand of Bradamante, and becomes the ancestor of the house of Este, by apostasy. The poem finds him a pagan, and leaves him a Christian. All that ingenuity can effect is employed to extenuate his desertion; nevertheless, the sympathies of every reader must be with the Saracen Rodomonte when he appears in the last canto to tax Ruggiero with his change of sides, and necessarily (for otherwise what would have become of the house of Este?) is slain for his loyalty, to the scandal of poetical justice.

That Ariosto, apart from his boundless invention and

command of language and narrative, was a true poet, is shown by the extreme beauty of the majority of the introductions to his cantos, where he appears even more at home than in the descriptions of the deeds of prowess of which he was at bottom so sceptical. Another strong point is the number, vividness, and originality of his similes, not in general copied from ancient poets, but peculiar to himself, and perfectly descriptive of the object designed to be illustrated. One of the most apparently characteristic similes of a great master of quaint comparison, the late Coventry Patmore, is borrowed from him.[1]

The sense of Ariosto is easily represented in English, but it is another matter to reproduce his felicity of phrase. The following stanzas in Miss Ellen Clerke's version are from the description of Angelica's flight from Rinaldo :

> "*Through dark and fearsome woods she takes her flight,*
> *By desert places wild, and lonely ways.*
> *The stirring of the leaves and foliage light*
> *Of oak, or elm, or beech that softly sways,*
> *Doth startle her aside in sudden fright,*
> *To wander here and there as in a maze;*
> *While every shadow seen on hill or hollow*
> *Seems to her fear Rinaldo's who doth follow.*
>
> *As baby fawn, or tender bleating goat,*
> *Which from its leafy cradle hath espied*
> *Its hapless dam seized by the quivering throat,*
> *By leopard fierce, and oped her breast or side,*
> *Flees from the brute to sylvan depths remote,*
> *Trembling with fears by fancy multiplied,*
> *And at each stump that she in passing touches,*
> *Deems that the monster grasps her in its clutches.*

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[1] "*Joltings of the heart, like wine*
Poured from a flask of narrow neck."
See *Orlando Furioso*, canto xxiii. st. 113.

That day and night, and all the next, sped she
In circles round about, she knew not where,
But reached at last a grove right fair to see,
Stirred lightly by the cool and fragrant air.
Two crystal streamlets, murmuring o'er the lea,
Perennially refreshed the herbage there,
And a sweet tune sang, in melodious treble,
Their gentle current, chafed by flint and pebble.

And deeming that she here is safe indeed,
A thousand miles beyond Rinaldo's quest,
Weary of summer heat and travel speed,
Resolves she for brief spell to take a rest;
'Mid flowers dismounts, and looses in the mead
Her palfrey, and doth of the rein divest,
To wander by the wave pellucid flowing,
With juicy grasses on its margin growing.

A tempting bush she sees, not far away,
Of thorn a-bloom with roses blushing red,
Which in the wave doth glass itself alway,
Screened from the sun by spreading oaks o'erhead.
An empty space within it doth display
A chamber cool, with densest shade o'erspread,
Where leaves and branches roof so close have woven,
Nor sun nor glance its dusk hath ever cloven.

A couch of softest grass within the lair
Invites to rest upon its herbage sweet.
Down in its midst doth sink the lady fair,
And lays her there, and sleeps in that retreat;
But not for long, for shortly she was 'ware
Of the approaching tread of coming feet.
She softly rises, and through leaves a-quiver
A knight in armour sees draw near the river."

The morality of the *Orlando Furioso*, some licentious episodes excepted which stand quite apart from the main action, may be considered good, being that of a refined [illegible] the circle where lofty virtues were cordially [illegible], however they might fail to be

exemplified in practice. Ariosto does not, like Tasso, convey the impression of a man above his time, and only depressed to its level by unpropitious circumstances. He is the child of his age, at the summit of its average elevation, but not transcending this. Yet it would have been well for Italy if her princes and statesmen had generally acted upon those ideas of honour and loyalty which they found and doubtless admired in their favourite poet. Such precepts as the following, even though enforced by the teacher's example, were in their view much too good for ordinary practice:

"*Bundle with cord is not so bound, I ween,*
Or plank to plank so riveted by nail,
As knightly troth that once hath plighted been,
Doth with the true and loyal soul prevail.
Nor is Fidelity depicted seen,
Save robed from head to foot in candid veil,
Visage enveloping and frame and limb,
Since but one stain would make her wholly dim.

Pure must she ever be, and free from spot,
If to one only or to thousands plighted;
Nor less if vowed in woodland wild or grot
Far from men's ways and dwellings disunited,
Than where the judge doth duly law allot,
And deeds are sealed, and testimonies cited.
Nor oath she needs, or like appeal to Heaven;
Enough the solemn word once gravely given.

His pledge chivalric, and the faith he gave,
Zerbin in every circumstance defended;
But ne'er did prove himself their duteous slave
More than when now disconsolate he wended
With this detested hag, whom like the grave
His soul abhorred: by plague or death attended,
Full sooner had he fared; but honour's claim
Bound him to that objectionable dame."

To appreciate Zerbino's fidelity to his word, it must be known that, having been vanquished in a joust, he has been compelled to vow to escort a hideous old woman of singular depravity, and to maintain her beauty and virtue against all comers, with the prospect of being killed in her service. A more comic situation will hardly be found in any of the romances.

Ariosto's comedies must be considered along with the Italian drama in general. The most important of his minor poetical works are the Satires, rather in the vein of Horace than of Juvenal, and, in truth, hardly satires at all in any proper sense of the term. They are good metrical talk on light subjects, elegant, chatty, and discursive. His own disappointments are alluded to very good-humouredly. His lyrical pieces are not remarkable, except one impressive sonnet, in which he appears to express compunction for the irregularities of his life:

"*How may I deem That thou in heaven wilt hear,*
O Lord divine, my fruitless prayer to Thee,
If for all clamour of the tongue Thou see
That yet unto the heart the net is dear?
Sunder it Thou, who all behold'st so clear,
Nor heed the stubborn will's oppugnancy,
And this do Thou perform, ere, fraught with me,
Charon to Tartarus his pinnace steer.
By habitude of ill that veils Thy light,
And sensual lure, and paths in error trod,
Evil from good no more I know aright.
Ruth for frail soul submissive to the rod
May move a mortal; in her own despite
To drag her heavenward is work of God."

Late in life the poet married; whether he also reformed seems doubtful. His amours, however, were unaccom-

panied by tragedy or scandal. In fact, this most wildly imaginative of the Italian poets seems to have had less than most poets of the poetic temperament, and the amiability for which he is universally praised was not accompanied by any remarkable acuteness of feeling. His virtues were those of an excellent man of the world; he was liberal, courteous, sensible, just, and sincere.

The success of the *Orlando Furioso*, which Bernardo Tasso, writing in 1559, affirms to be better known and more talked of than Homer, naturally produced the same effect as the popularity of Scott and Byron produced in England—"All could raise the flower, for all had got the seed." The two most important of these imitations, the *Girone il Cortese* of Luigi Alamanni and the *Amadigi* of Bernardo Tasso—both good poets, to be mentioned again in other departments of literature—resemble Pygmalion's image before the interposition of Venus; all the constituents of a fine poem are there, but the breath of life is wanting. "The *Girone*," says Ginguené, "is a very dignified, very rational, and generally well-written poem, but cold and consequently somewhat tiresome." If there is more warmth in the *Amadigi*, there is also more loquacity, and the power of the author, an excellent writer on a small scale, is quite inadequate to sustain continuous interest through a hundred cantos. The comparison which he necessarily courts with the old romance of Vasco Lobeira, the best work of its class, is always unfavourable to him. His copious employment of elfin machinery gave him opportunities of which he failed to avail himself. The best of him as an epic writer is his gift of brilliant description. The younger Tasso's *Rinaldo* is a very extraordinary production for a youth of eighteen, but the impulse towards the chival-

rous epic was exhausted by his time, and he wisely found another way of rivalling Ariosto. The *Orlandino* and the *Ricciardetto* belong rather to the class of the mock heroic, to be treated hereafter. The names of a few of the most remarkable *bona-fide* attempts at chivalric poetry must suffice: the *Guerino il Meschino* of Tullia d'Aragona, the *Ogier the Dane* of Cassiodoro Narni, the *Death of Ruggiero* of Giambatista Pescatore, the *Triumphs of Charlemagne* of Francesco de' Lodovici, the *First Exploits of Orlando* of Lodovico Dolce, and the *Angelica Innamorata* of Vincenzo Brusantini.

Apart from the poems of the chivalric cycles, Italy witnessed but few attempts at epic in the first half of the sixteenth century. Of the author of one of these, however, it might be said, *Magnis excidit ausis.* GIOVANNI GIORGIO TRISSINO was born of a noble family at Vicenza in 1478. He repaired the defects of a neglected education with singular industry, and endeared himself to the two Medici Popes, Leo and Clement, who entrusted him with important diplomatic missions. His most successful poetical work, the tragedy of *Sophonisba* (1515), brought him great fame, and actually does mark an era in the history of the drama. He wrote much on grammar, but could effect only one reform, the distinction between *i* and *j* and *u* and *v*. After his retirement from diplomacy Trissino lived many years among his fellow-citizens, wealthy and honoured; but his later years were embittered by a painful and disastrous lawsuit with his son by his first marriage. He died in 1549.

Trissino had commenced in 1525 the composition of his epic, *The Deliverance of Italy from the Goths*, which was published in 1547 and 1548. It has some

literary interest as the first attempt to write Italian epic poetry in blank verse, but its great misfortune is to be in verse of any kind. The diction is good, the exposition simple and clear; if turned into prose it would make a pleasant story for youth, something like Fénelon's *Telemachus*. But how a man of Trissino's cultivation could have persuaded himself that a mere metrical form, and this neither artful nor tuneful, could turn prose into poetry, is indeed difficult to understand. The disyllabic termination of the lines—almost inevitable in Italian—is not conducive to metrical majesty at the best; and Trissino seems to have had no idea of cadence or variety, and to have been content if he could scan his lines upon his fingers. There is no inspiration, and no pretence to inspiration, from exordium to peroration of his sober epic; his Pegasus is not only a pack-horse, but a pack-horse without bells.

In truth, the displacement of the Goths, making room for the Pope, the Lombard and the Byzantine Exarch, was no deliverance for Italy, but her great misfortune. A poet, however, is not obliged like a historian to distinguish nicely between Theodoric and Alaric; and Trissino, with all his pedantry, might have ranked as a bard if he could have felt as a patriot; if he could have depicted the Italy of the Goths as the prototype of the Italy of his own age, rent amid French and Spaniards and Germans. Whether he conceived the idea or not, he could not or dared not give it utterance. He nevertheless energetically denounced the abuses of the Papacy by a prophecy put into the mouth of an angel.

The history of chivalric poetry is especially interesting, as it in all probability exactly repeats that of the Homeric epic. While the great events, the siege of Troy

and the Saracen invasion of France, are being really enacted, we have no poetry at all. After two or three centuries ballads appear, disfiguring genuine history, and shifting its centre of gravity to incidents unimportant in themselves, but susceptible of poetical treatment. After two or three more, poets arise who embellish these romances, bestow poetical form upon them, and work them into consistent wholes. Had Italy been no further advanced than Greece at the corresponding epoch, the poems of Boiardo and Ariosto would have braved two centuries of oral recitation, and come much corrupted and interpolated into the hands of some Aristarchus who would have given them their final form. The invention of printing suppressed this ultimate stage of development, but encouraged the growth of imitators, whom it preserved from annihilation, while unable to preserve them from oblivion.

CHAPTER XII

MACHIAVELLI AND GUICCIARDINI

WE have now traversed nearly three centuries of Italian literature without encountering one really great prose-writer, Boccaccio only excepted. Unquestionably the development of Italian prose was retarded by the cultivation of Latin, which deprived it of ornaments in Petrarch, Pontano, and Æneas Sylvius—to say nothing of the buried talent which the example of such writers would have called into activity. With every allowance on these accounts, it is still remarkable how generally the path of the historian of early Italian literature lies amid the flowers of poetry and fiction. But the time had now come when, as in Greece, the national genius was about to assert itself in prose, and, also as in Greece, the movement was heralded by historians. After a long interval, due to the exclusive cultivation of ancient models, the Italian Herodotus, Giovanni Villani, was to be followed by two men who might dispute the character of the Italian Thucydides, who at all events belonged to that invaluable class of historians who, like Thucydides, Polybius, and Procopius, are statesmen too, and participators in the events of which they are the narrators and the judges. This advantage was possessed in an eminent degree by FRANCESCO GUICCIARDINI, the historian of contemporary times; and though NICCOLO

MACHIAVELLI did not write his principal work as a contemporary, his knowledge of the Florentine constitution was so intimate as almost to invest him with the authority of an eye-witness of the Florentine revolutions of the past.

Niccolò Machiavelli, the first Italian and almost the first modern to display eminent genius as an historical and political writer, was born at Florence, May 3, 1469. His family had been illustrious for public services; his father, whom he lost at sixteen, was a jurist; his mother was a poetess. Little is known of his life until we find him in 1494 secretary to Marcello Virgilio, a learned man who four years afterwards became head of the chancery of the Republic, a post somewhat resembling Milton's Latin Secretaryship under the Commonwealth, but allowing more active participation in the business of diplomacy. Machiavelli rose along with his patron, and in 1500 was entrusted with a mission to France. In the following year he had a more arduous part to play as envoy to Cesar Borgia, then consolidating his power in the Romagna, but for the moment pressed with great difficulties. Machiavelli's reports of his mission have been preserved, and attest the impression made upon him by Cesar's supremacy in ability and villainy, which continued to fascinate him when years afterwards he composed his manual of political statecraft.

Judged in the sinister light which his writings have seemed to throw back upon his actions, he has been accused of having counselled and devised the coup by which Cesar destroyed his treacherous condottieri at Sinigaglia, as if the Borgia needed any tuition for an exploit of this nature. He is also censured for recording it without disapproval; but if

Cæsar had never done anything worse than rid the Romagna of its vermin, history would not be severe with him. Two years later, employed upon a mission to Rome, he beheld Cæsar's fall, and the elevation of Pope Julius, whom he accompanied on yet another mission to the conquest of Bologna. He was also despatched about this time on embassies to Germany and France, and his observations on the circumstances and characteristics of both nations exhibit great sagacity. Soon afterwards the affairs of the Republic became troubled, hemmed in as she was between the transalpine powers and the Pope and the exiled Medici. Machiavelli was actively engaged in organising her military resources, but his efforts were fruitless. The restoration of the Medici was effected in September 1512. Machiavelli lost his employments, and soon afterwards, upon suspicion of participation in a conspiracy, was thrown into prison, tortured, and owed his deliverance to an amnesty granted as an act of grace by the Medicean Pope Leo upon his election in 1513.

He retired to a small estate, where, as he tells us in a most interesting letter which has reached our times, he consoled himself with the study of the ancients, familiar intercourse with his rustic neighbours, and the composition of his *Prince*. The chief purpose of this famous work certainly was not to recommend himself to the Medici, but he would willingly have made it subservient to that end. They neglected him, however, until 1519, when Cardinal Medici, afterwards Pope Clement VII., called upon him for a memoir on the best method of administering the Florentine government, in which Machiavelli showed much dexterity in reconciling the interests of the house of Medici with the interests of his country. His advice

object of popular odium, its interest, except as regards its weighty plea for a popular army, is mainly historical and psychological. There is an intimate connection between the *Prince* and the seven books on the *Art of War*, written about 1520. In the *Prince* Machiavelli insists particularly upon the part which the habit of relying upon treacherous and mutinous mercenaries, and the consequent decay of public spirit among the citizens, had had in bringing about the ruin of the Italian states. In the *Art of War* he shows how the citizen army he recommends is to be organised and led in battles and sieges. His experience of military affairs as an eye-witness, as well as an administrator, had been considerable, and he is by no means to be slighted as a tactical writer; but the military [illegible] on the eve of great changes, which rendered much of his wisdom obsolete.

The *Discourses on Livy's Decade* occupy a middle position between political and historical [illegible]. They are entirely grounded on the study of Livy, but their main importance consists not in the [illegible] upon the transactions Livy has related, [illegible] application of these to the general principles of [illegible] and to the circumstances of the writer's own [illegible]. They may be defined as in some sort the [illegible] larger scale, and copiously illustrated [illegible] amples; but the effect is much [illegible] other book Machiavelli appears [illegible] analyst of politics, and his real [illegible] reasonably questioned; but the [illegible] doubt of his genuine patriotism [illegible] of morality to obliquity, except [illegible] him, the interest of the state [illegible]

the Romagna, the theatre of Cæsar Borgia's exploits—he would have been much more earnest in pressing it upon their attention. If, on the other hand, satire had been his chief object, this would have been more mordant and poignant; his power of contemptuous irony is only revealed in the short chapter on the Papal monarchy. His aim probably was to show how to build up a principality capable of expelling the foreigner and restoring the independence of Italy. But this intention could not be safely expressed, and hence his work seems repulsive, because the reason of state which he propounds as an apology for infringing the moral code appears not patriotic, but purely selfish.

In our day we have seen Italian independence won by appeals to the patriotism of the nation at large. This was impossible in Machiavelli's time; nor, had it been otherwise, would his lips have been touched with the live coal of a Mazzini. He could only speak as a politician to politicians, and addressing himself as it were to a body of scientific experts, he designedly excludes all considerations of morality. His treatise appears antiquated in our day, when the national conscience is as easily manipulated as the conscience of the individual; in oligarchical ages it passed not unreasonably for a perfect manual of statecraft, and exercised great influence upon the statesmen of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Frederick the Great assailed it vehemently in his youth, but lived to compliment it by what has been described as the sincerest form of flattery. In Frederick's century, when public affairs actually were in the hands of a few able rulers, it was worth attacking and defending; in the present democratic age, when a statesman who squared his conduct by its maxims would soon find himself the

object of popular odium, its interest, except as regards its weighty plea for a popular army, is mainly historical and psychological. There is an intimate connection between the *Prince* and the seven books on the *Art of War*, written about 1520. In the *Prince* Machiavelli insists particularly upon the part which the habit of relying upon treacherous and mutinous mercenaries, and the consequent decay of public spirit among the citizens, had had in bringing about the ruin of the Italian states. In the *Art of War* he shows how the citizen army he recommends is to be organised and led in battles and sieges. His experience of military affairs as an eye-witness, as well as an administrator, had been considerable, and he is by no means to be slighted as a tactical writer; but the military art was on the eve of great changes, which rendered much of his wisdom obsolete.

The *Discourses on Livy's Decades* occupy a middle position between political and historical science. They are entirely grounded on the study of Livy; but their main importance consists not in the commentary upon the transactions Livy has related, but in the application of these to the general principles of politics and to the circumstances of the writer's own country. They may be defined as in some sort the *Prince* rewritten on a larger scale, and copiously illustrated by historical examples; but the effect is much more pleasing. In the other book Machiavelli appears as the mere scientific analyst of politics, and his real purpose might be reasonably questioned; but the *Discourses* leave no doubt of his genuine patriotism and of his preference of morality to obliquity, except where, as it seems to him, the interest of the state interferes. The problem

of the permissibility of an act reprehensible in the abstract, but required by the safety of the state—as, for example, Mohammed Ali's massacre of the Mamelukes—is a very difficult one, and Machiavelli cannot be fairly judged from the standpoint of the nineteenth century. He had not seen the trial and failure of his ideal prince on a colossal scale in the person of Napoleon. It was a cardinal error of his to deny a capacity of improvement to human nature and to assume that mankind would be essentially the same in all ages. We see, on the contrary, that the general standard of righteousness has been greatly raised since his time; and that, even if this were not so, the conditions of modern society are adverse to Machiavellian policy: to import this perception, however, into the criticism of his work would be but to reverse his own mistake. Many other criticisms might be addressed to him: he did not, for example, foresee that another set of patriots, from their own point of view, might arise, whose conception of the *summum bonum* in polity would be entirely different from his own; and that within a few years his maxims might serve as an arsenal for the Jesuits, whose objects would have been his utter abomination. With all his faults and oversights, nothing can deprive Machiavelli of the glory of having been the modern Aristotle in politics, the first, or at least the first considerable writer who derived a practical philosophy from history, and exalted statecraft into science.

Machiavelli's *History of Florence* is not, like his *Discourses*, a work of profound thought, nor is it authoritative in any respect. It rather exhibits him as the elegant and accomplished man of letters, and is perhaps the first successful restoration of the classical style of

history to a European vernacular. His great contemporary Guicciardini had indeed anticipated him with a fragment on the same subject, but this long remained unpublished, and it is not likely that Machiavelli ever saw it. Machiavelli has not delved deep for materials; much of the early part of his history is taken almost literally from Flavio Biondo and other predecessors. He has sometimes departed unjustifiably from strict matter of fact, not by invention or serious misrepresentation, but by accentuating and slightly modifying actual incidents to give them the particular colour he desires. In the main, however, his work is a faithful as well as an animated picture of the public life of a community in its characteristics more nearly akin to the ancient commonwealth of Athens than any the earth has seen since this disappeared from her face. The quality which will preserve even a bad history, and without which a good one will only live as a book of reference, is never absent from Machiavelli's—he entertains while he instructs. His work, which was composed after 1520 by order of Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, is divided into eight books, and extends from the beginning of Florentine history to the death of Lorenzo de' Medici in 1492. The intimate connection of Florence with the general course of Italian politics leads to frequent digressions and copious notices of neighbouring states. Another historical work of Machiavelli's, the Life of Castruccio Castracani, Prince of Lucca in the fourteenth century, is little more than a romance, in which he has endeavoured to depict the ideal soldier and statesman.

Machiavelli's plays and poems will be noticed elsewhere. They in no respect detract from his reputation. He came nearer than any contemporary, except Leonardo

da Vinci, to approving himself a universal genius. No man of his time stands higher intellectually, and his want of moral elevation is largely redeemed by his ample endowment with the one virtue chiefly needful to an Italian in his day, but of which too many Italians were destitute—patriotism.

Patriotism cannot be denied to Machiavelli's great counterpart, Francesco Guicciardini, and if it seems colder and more stained by unworthy subserviency and political cynicism, it must be remembered that these defects are the defects of the qualities in which Guicciardini surpassed his rival. Machiavelli was a genius of the creative order, and hence, with all his astuteness, occasionally somewhat Utopian; his life was free, and his muse licentious. Guicciardini had a great practical genius, infallible within a narrow sphere. He does not invent or generalise; his wisdom comes mainly by experience, and he accepts things for what they are. "His originality," says Signor Villari, "though doubtless considerable, was devoted to giving an exact and most lucid shape to the current doctrines of his day." "A sound judgment," he himself says in his *Ricordi*, "is better than a pregnant wit." He is correct in all the relations of life, and has not the least turn for writing comedies. Machiavelli, after all his experiences, still hopes like an enchanted maiden for the ideal prince. Guicciardini knows that there is none such, and that, even if there were, the barbarians would be too strong for him. He coldly accepts the situation and hires himself out to a bad Government, with this redeeming quality, that it is still a Government of Italians by Italians. It may be said that Machiavelli was willing to enter the service of the Medici, and such is the fact; but

Florence had owed glorious days to Cosmo and Lorenzo, and Machiavelli could never have thought or written of them as Guicciardini did of his Papal employers:

"*No one can have a stronger detestation than mine for the avarice, ambition, and sloth of the priesthood. Nevertheless, the position I have always held with several pontiffs has compelled me to love them for mine own advantage; and but for this consideration I should have loved Martin Luther as myself, not for the purpose of freeing myself from the laws introduced by the Christian religion, as it is generally interpreted and understood, but in order to see this herd of wretches reduced to their proper condition, namely, that of their being left either without vices or without authority.*"

It had not always been so. The Papal satellite had been a trusted envoy of the Florentine Government. Born in 1483, he had studied law at Ferrara and Padua, become an advocate on his return to Florence, married advantageously, and in 1512 discharged a mission to Spain, where he graduated in diplomacy under the eye of the most crafty and faithless prince of the Age of Perfidy, Ferdinand the Catholic. The revolution which restored the Medici occurred in his absence. He accepted the situation, but instead of serving the Government at home, passed into the employment of the Medicean Pope, Leo X., to whom he must have been highly recommended, for he immediately received the government of Modena, Reggio, and Parma, recently added to the states of the Church, in which he showed the utmost energy and sagacity in suppressing malefactors and preserving order. From 1524 to 1527 he was President of the Romagna, and until 1534, when he retired from the Pope's service, Governor of Bologna, and all evidence goes to show that the Papal power was

never more faithfully served than by the man who held it in such abhorrence. He cannot be acquitted of having favoured the overthrow of Florentine liberty in 1530, and is accused of acts of cupidity and vengeance which do not seem in harmony with his general character. He returned to his native city in 1534, hoping to play an important part under the restored dynasty; but the youthful Duke Cosmo, who needed no tutor in the arts of intrigue and dissimulation, gently thrust him aside, and the disappointed politician solaced his latter years with the composition of his history. Six years of literary leisure gave him a renown which his twenty years of active concern with the world's business would never have procured him. He died in 1540, leaving his history still in want of the last touches.

It is, nevertheless, the leading fault of this very great book to have had too many touches already. Guicciardini, like Gibbon, thought much of his dignity, and assumed his historical as poets are said to assume their singing robes. He dropped the easy and vigorous style in which his fragment upon Florentine history had been composed in his youth, and wrote in a dignified and ambitious manner for which nature did not qualify him. Hence he is tedious, and the impression of tameness is enhanced by the unsatisfactory character of the incidents narrated, and the author's general deficiency in enthusiasm. With all these defects it is still one of the most valuable histories ever written. It might be entitled the History of the Decline and Fall of Italy, from the French invasion in 1494. For us the sadness of the picture is relieved by our knowledge of the splendour of literature and art in an age of complete dissolution of the body politic; but these redeeming cir-

cumstances do not enter into Guicciardini's view: he can only write as Polybius wrote of the downfall of Greece. He has much in common with this historian: both men of affairs; both largely concerned with the events they describe; both embittered by public calamities and contemptuous of the capacity of their countrymen; both patriotic children of a ruined state, while compelled, and not wholly averse, to adopt intimate association with the conqueror; neither of them the master of a good style, but compensating this defect by good sense and the invaluable political lessons they derive from the transactions they record.

Another statesman-historian, Ranke, has brought heavy charges against Guicciardini, both of plagiarism and of wilful manipulation of facts, but he seems to have been successfully answered by Signor Villari in his Life of Machiavelli. Villari, who has had access to the archives of Guicciardini's family, is able to show the extent to which he availed himself of MS. materials, and his care in working them up into his history. Many of his statements which have since been shown to be erroneous, were in conformity with the general belief of his time.

Guicciardini's literary glory was enhanced, though his moral character suffered some injury, by the publication of his inedited writings in ten volumes in 1857 and following years. These include, with other important matter, the fragment of Florentine history to which reference has been made; his official correspondence as diplomatist and governor, full of historical information and practical sagacity; the considerations on Machiavelli, his friend and fellow-expert in politics, characteristic of the natures of the two men, so eminent respectively in

theory and in practice; the *Dialogue on the Government of Florence*, avowing this ostensible partisan of the Medici's secret preference for a republic, though an oligarchical one; most important of all, the *Ricordi politici e civili*, maxims and memoranda of a statesman. These are purely aphoristic, without system or unity beyond that which they necessarily derive from the constitution of the mind upon which they have been impressed by experience and reflection.

"He fully understood," says Villari, "that by this plan his counsels and political maxims became nothing more than simple observations, palliatives and tricks for the wiser or less wise guidance of the social machine, apart from all radical reform or the creation of any new system of political science or moral philosophy, and still less of any new state or new people. But he neither hoped nor desired to entertain hopes of so lofty a nature. System he did not seek, daring hypotheses were not to his taste; he merely gathered the fruit of his own and others' daily experience." In a word, Guicciardini was a realist; Machiavelli, for all his worldly wisdom, an idealist. As the Bishop of London has remarked: "It is the weakness of Machiavelli's political method that, while professing to deal with politics in a practical spirit, he is not practical enough." It would seem Guicciardini's chief fault to have taken too limited a view of human affairs, and to have judged too exclusively from what was happening in his own corner. The imperfection of historical materials, however, rendered any attempt at a philosophy of history extremely difficult, and Guicciardini's time was too much occupied by administrative labours for profound investigation. Notwithstanding his opportunism and political

pessimism, he had an ideal, and he tells us plainly what it was :

"I desire to see three things before my death—but I doubt I may live long enough without seeing any of them—a well-ordered republican mode of life in our own city, the deliverance of Italy from all barbarians, and the world freed from the tyranny of these execrable priests."

The mutability of the world might almost seem to justify Guicciardini's hand-to-mouth method of getting through it. We have seen Petrarch two centuries earlier calling for the Pope's return to Rome as the panacea for all the ills of Italy. Guicciardini would have sided with him in that age; in his own the same genius of liberty which spoke by Petrarch's mouth to demand the Pope's restoration speaks by his to demand the Pope's expulsion. It was not given to him to see the great value in evil times of the temporal power—in good times monstrous —as an asylum for what little of independence could still subsist in Italy, and a testimony, however feeble, to a moral and spiritual unity destined to develop into a national unity. But against the Papal sway on its own merits, apart from the accidental circumstances of the time, Guicciardini and Machiavelli prophesy like the two witnesses of the Apocalypse.

CHAPTER XIII

OTHER PROSE-WRITERS OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

ITALY now possessed a perfect standard of prose. She had already had one in the fourteenth century, when so rapid had been the development of the power of expression that the form had outrun the substance. She could say anything; but except by the mouth of the novelist Boccaccio, and that of Petrarch, who preferred to write his prose in Latin, had found little worthy of emphatic utterance. It may be partly owing to this poverty of matter in the vernacular literature, as well as to the passion for Latin, that style decayed so greatly during the fifteenth century. Yet, so far as the latter of these causes operated, the evil brought its own remedy: it was impossible to be as deeply versed as Pontano or Politian in the elegances of Latin without becoming impatient of barbarism and pedantry in Italian. Sannazaro, an exquisite Latin writer, was perhaps the first considerable man who insisted on an even standard of distinction in both languages. Fortunately for Italy, the *Arcadia* was a very popular book; fortunately, too, the Latin constructions with which it is replete were not so easily imitated as its general refinement of phrase. By the time of Leo X. inelegance had almost disappeared from Italian literature, and Italy might boast her-

self the only country in Europe that possessed a perfect literary language; wanting, indeed, the golden simplicity of the thirteenth century, but still the prose of cultivated men, and adequate for every form of literary composition. The intellectual distinction thus conferred upon the nation, combined with her still more pronounced superiority in the arts, seemed, as with Greece in similar circumstances, to regain for her a dominion more illustrious than that of which she had been despoiled. For a hundred years her authors were the arbiters of taste and the models of Europe, a sovereignty which might have been prolonged had it been possible for her to place herself on the right and victorious side in the great battle for civil and religious freedom that resounded throughout the sixteenth century.

As in all countries at their first awakening to an era of literary culture, this culture had gone deep enough to produce a multitude of authors, but not deep enough to generate a literary public capable of supporting them. The appetite for fame and the delight in authorship filled the ranks of literature with aspiring recruits, but the commissariat, without which no army can keep the field, had to be supplied by patronage, either from individuals or the state. Hence, except when some wealthy noble like Angelo di Costanzo was smitten with the passion for literary fame, we usually find the writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, even when most illustrious, in a condition of dependence. When with this is considered the utter absence of civil freedom (for Venice, the one free city, hospitable to authors, allowed little liberty to printers), it is remarkable that the servility of the writers should have extended so little beyond their dedications. Especially is this the case with his-

tory, which, notwithstanding the influences at work to disfigure and corrupt it, remained on the whole surprisingly impartial. This must be ascribed in great part to the influence of classic models; partly, also, to the real mental superiority of most of those who in the sixteenth century essayed this form of composition.

No form is more attractive than the historical to men ambitious to shine in letters, and conscious of high talent without creative genius. "*No merita il nome di creatore, se non Iddio ed il Poeta;*" but delineation of character and representation of events are as it were an inferior kind of creation out of pre-existing material, like that ascribed by ancient theology to the Demiurgus. The literary genius of Italy addressed itself eagerly to the task. Ere long almost every considerable state had its vernacular historian. Some of the most important writers, nevertheless, continued to compose in Latin. Among these the most eminent was that very secular prelate and not very trustworthy historian PAOLO GIOVIO, Bishop of Nocera (1483–1552), one of the men whose chief title to fame in our day is to have been famous in their own, but who was certainly reckoned as the chief historian of his time, and whose biographies of eminent men of letters and illustrious captains are still found valuable. Part of his general history of his own times perished in the sack of Rome (1527), and, with a sensitiveness not dishonourable to him, he shrank from recording the transactions of a time when the vials of wrath seemed so visibly poured out upon the Papacy. Except for the gaps indicated, his history extends from 1494 to 1547. Literature sustained a heavy loss in the disappearance of the work of Andrea Navagero, another Latin historian (1483–1529), who had been entrusted by

the Venetian Government with the history of their Republic. The loss of another historian—Girolamo Borgia, who wrote the history of Italy in the days of Alexander VI. and Julius II.—is greatly to be deplored, not because he was distinguished as a writer, but because he was a Borgia.

The historian of Florence had given the first example of really classic Italian history, and Florence, though backward in comparison with Venice in the diffusion of literature by the art of printing, still took the lead among Italian cities in literary as well as artistic cultivation. A group of Florentine annalists sprung up, whose pens were chiefly exerted for the honour of their birthplace. Their candour generally prevented the publication of their works in their lifetime. Such is the case with JACOPO NARDI, who wrote the history of Florence from the expulsion of the Medici in 1494 to their final restoration in 1530, "with sincerity of intention and painstaking accuracy" (Symonds), but also with the acrimony to be expected from a banished patriot who fought for liberty to the last, and for the remainder of his life ate the bread of exile at Venice. The style is accused of aridity; but his translation of Livy is regarded as one of the best in the Italian language. His own history was not published until 1582, nor that of his continuator Segni until 1713, although this elegant historian, whose work occupies the period from 1527 to 1555, was a partisan of the Medici. A portion of the same epoch, from 1527 to 1538, is described much more diffusely by BENEDETTO VARCHI, one of the most prolific men of letters of his time. Varchi, though a devotee of the liberty of whose restoration he despaired, wrote by the special commission of the Grand Duke Cosmo, which neither affected

his impartiality nor protected him from being nearly murdered by some private persons who had been offended by his honesty, nor prevented his history from remaining in MS. until the eighteenth century. In 1570 SCIPIONE AMMIRATO, a Neapolitan, received a commission from the Grand Duke to write a general history of Florence, which he brought down to 1574. His free access to archives enabled him to be more accurate than any predecessor. He also compiled some valuable genealogical works. The history of Ferrara was written by Pigna, and that of Genoa by Foglietta and Bonfadio, all of whom may be considered standard historians. The same can hardly be said of any other of the numerous local writers whom Italy produced in this age, except Porzio, the historian of the conspiracy of the Neapolitan barons against King Ferdinand; Graziani, who recounted the Venetian wars in Cyprus; and three others who deserve notice not merely as historians but as typical figures.

Never since Petrarch's day had the sceptre of Italian literature rested so unequivocally in one hand as in PIETRO BEMBO'S during the second quarter of the sixteenth century. In one respect Bembo's pre-eminence is even more remarkable than his predecessor's, for Petrarch towered immeasurably above any possible competitor except Boccaccio, while Bembo was so far from being the first man of his day that he was not even a man of genius. His wonderful gift for felicitous imitation, whether in prose or verse, was unaccompanied by any power of original thought. But he possessed beyond any contemporary the formal perfection of style, whether in Latin or Italian, demanded by the age. His History of Venice, which alone concerns us here, was originally

published in the former language, but Bembo vindicated his claim to a place among Italian historians by himself translating it into Italian. He had succeeded Andrea Navagero as Venetian historiographer in 1529.

Born at Venice in 1470, and son of the magistrate who so honourably distinguished himself by raising a monument to Dante at Ravenna, Bembo had all his life enjoyed the favour of the great. He had been the Platonic admirer of Lucrezia Borgia, who had honoured him with the shining tress and the dull letters religiously preserved in the Brera Library at Milan. Leo X. had made him his secretary before issuing from his own conclave, and, with munificence for once well applied, had provided him with means to occupy a delicious retreat at Padua, where he was residing when he received the Venetian commission. At a later period Paul III., who loved to surround himself with illustrious men, raised him to the Cardinalate and drew him to Rome, where he died in 1547, more admired and lamented than any man of letters of his time. His history, which extends from 1487 to 1513, and which he composed with his eye upon Cæsar, is the image of the writer, perfect in the harmony of its periods, and carrying the reader rapidly along its smooth surface, but surface alone, describing every occurrence as the ordinary man saw it and the statesman did not, with no attempt to search out the secret springs of action, no reference to documents public or private, and, which is more surprising, no effort to delineate a remarkable character. That this would not have exceeded his powers is shown by his beautiful portrait of the Duchess of Urbino, in his Latin life of her husband.

Bembo's successor, PIETRO PARUTA (1540–98), who continued his history to 1551, typifies the statesman

historian, versed in diplomacy and public business, and so highly endowed with the qualifications demanded by such employments as to have become Procurator of the Republic, and to have been prevented only by his death from becoming Doge. He was consequently well fitted to write the annals of a state like Venice, and his work stands high among Italian histories. The third exceptional historian of the age, typical of the accomplished literary amateur, is ANGELO DI COSTANZO, a Neapolitan noble whom we shall meet again among the poets. He wrote the history of Naples from 1250 to 1486, and is interesting as the pupil of Sannazaro, the friend of Vittoria Colonna, a patrician whose love of letters led him to cultivate authorship, and a patriot whose love of country gave umbrage to the jealous Spanish viceroy, and subjected him to perpetual confinement to his estates. His history does not disappoint the favourable prepossessions thus aroused, being composed with great elegance and dignity, and a manifest love of truth; insomuch that the author of the modern standard history of Naples, Giannone, while supplying Costanzo's defects by close attention to jurisprudence, public economy, and other subjects neglected by his predecessor, has transfused most of the latter's narrative into his own.

Biography, the most attractive form of prose composition, was also well represented in this age, but inspired only two standard works, extremely unlike in style and spirit, but both possessions for all time, and both relating to the fine arts. GIORGIO VASARI (1512–74), biographer-general of painters, sculptors, and architects, may be called the Herodotus of art; a practitioner himself, and acquainted with many of the persons whom he describes; lively and garrulous, appa-

rently most artless, he possesses either the science or the knack of felicitous composition in an extraordinary degree. Living when picturesque stories about artists were accepted without question, he is entirely unembarrassed in relating such as commend themselves to him, to the joy of the readers and the scandal of the critics of the future. It is probable that scepticism of the truth of his anecdotes and the authority due to his attributions of pictures has gone much too far; but however this may be, criticism will never be able to turn his living book into a dead one, or to invalidate our debt to him for the mass of unquestionably authentic particulars which he has preserved. His good taste in art as well as in literature is evinced by his admiration for the first-fruits of the early Tuscan school, neglected in his day, and his character appears throughout his work in the most amiable light. His chief defect, a serious one, is the imperfection of his information respecting the important schools of Lombardy and Venice.

There is little amiability in a still more distinguished writer, whose pen has gained him the immortality which he expected from the chisel and the graver. BENVENUTO CELLINI (1501–71) was undoubtedly a very eminent artist; yet the autobiography which has preserved his name, while those of Pompeo Tarcone and Alessandro Cesati are forgotten, is a greater work of art than any he accomplished in his own vocation. It may be compared to the realistic sculpture of Donatello, surpassing in vigour and animation the ideal models of which it falls short in elegance and grace. It is the counterpart of a man, and a very manly man, all muscle and sinew and rude force, a boaster, a bully, a libertine, a duellist, almost an assassin, one whom a slight change of circum-

stances would easily have made a brigand or a bravo, but always the artist. No book, it is probable, gives a better idea of the general atmosphere of the Italy of the sixteenth century; assuredly no other delineation is nearly so vivid. With truly Pepysian unconsciousness the writer depicts in himself the man of turbulent and impracticable character moving among princes and nobles, outraging their forbearance by every action of his life, and revenging himself for their exhausted patience by malicious truth or reckless calumny. The general fidelity of the picture, however, does not depend upon the accuracy of particular statements, and Cellini's untruths where his own vanity is concerned do not impair his claim to confidence as a delineator of his age. Of the literary merit of his performance it is needless to speak; if not at the very head of entertaining autobiographies, it is at least second to none. The English reader will be continually reminded of Haydon; although, however, Haydon's confidence in himself was no less robust than Cellini's, he had far less reason for it, nor, with all his vividness, is he the Italian's equal in graphic power.

One other prose-writer of the period, and perhaps only one, may be considered as much an author for all time as Vasari and Cellini. This is BALDASSARE CASTIGLIONE, whose *Cortegiano* depicts the ideal life of the accomplished Italian courtier—a character of more importance in that day than he can be in ours. In Castiglione's time not only were the court and good society almost convertible expressions, but the relation of the courtier to the court was far more intimate than it can be now. It actually was his sphere, which he seldom forsook except when absent on military enterprises or public business; he was

in habits of daily intercourse with his sovereign, and professed courtesy and civility as others professed arts or trades. A competent writer on the court and its accomplishments, therefore, was necessarily an instructor in manners and refinement, and as such might exercise an important influence on his age. While the equally accomplished Casa, in his *Galateo*, instructed the average gentleman in good manners, the courtier's training fell to the lot of Castiglione, than whom no man could be better qualified either by actual disposition or the circumstances of his life. A Mantuan by birth, he had served the Duke of Urbino, had exemplified Italian refinement at the English court on a mission to receive the Garter for his sovereign, and when he wrote (1518), was envoy at the court of Leo X., and the intimate friend of the most cultivated men of his age.

The machinery of his book is a report, imaginary in form, but faithful in spirit, of dialogues held at the court of Urbino among the distinguished persons who frequented it at various times. They are by no means frivolous; Castiglione's standard, not merely of deportment and manly exercise, but of intellectual accomplishment, is very high. The conversations deal with such themes as the preferable form of government and the condition of women, and are handled with signal elegance, acumen, and graceful but not cumbrous erudition. They are interspersed with pleasant stories admirably told, and would give a fascinating idea of Italian court life, were it not so evident that its darker features have been kept out of view, and that the general relation of Castiglione's picture to reality is that of Sannazaro's Arcadia to the actual life of shepherds. Yet the picture has many elements of truth, and it speaks well for the

age that it could produce even such an ideal. "Carried to the north of Europe," says Mr. Courthope, "and grafted on the still chivalrous manners of the English aristocracy, the ideal of Castiglione contributed to form the character of Sir Philip Sidney." The delicacy of Castiglione's sentiments is shown by his bitter mortification at the unjust reproaches of Clement VII., into whose service he afterwards entered, and who accused him of failure as a diplomatist. These are said to have broken his heart. He died in 1529. Raphael had painted his portrait, his tomb was designed by Giulio Romano, and his epitaph was written by Bembo.

"Love rules the court, the camp, the grove." The *Asolani* of Bembo, therefore, a disquisition on Love from different points of view, composed in imitation of Cicero's Tusculan Questions, should take precedence of Castiglione's *Cortegiano*, but it can hardly be said that it does. The *Cortegiano* is a piece of real life, indicating, if not precisely what the highest Italian society was, at all events what it felt it ought to be. Bembo's dialogues, or rather monologues, might have been composed in any age of refinement; they are purely academical in form, and the perpetual justice of the sentiments is purchased by perpetual commonplace. Seldom, however, have commonplaces been set off with such harmony and polish of style, or with more ingenious eloquence, especially at the conclusion, where the Hermit reconciles Love's advocates and his accusers by descanting on the charms of ideal beauty. If it be true that to have read it was the indispensable passport to good society, the circumstance is creditable to the age's literary taste, and still more so to its standard of ideal excellence. Bembo's prose is more satisfactory than his poetry, perhaps be-

cause it raises less expectation; in verse the wonder is that he attains no further, and in prose that he attains so far. *Gli Asolani*, first published in 1505, was written at the age of twenty-eight, and was dedicated to Lucrezia Borgia. On the strength of it Bembo is made the chief interlocutor in Castiglione's *Cortegiano* when the question of love is touched upon.

The number of writers at this period who, if not always moral, may be described as moralists, is very considerable. ALESSANDRO PICCOLOMINI, afterwards Archbishop of Patras, wrote a complete institution of the citizen which is not devoid of merit; but he is better remembered by a sin of his youth, the *Dialogo della bella creanza delle donne*, in which an Italian Martha successfully exhorts an Italian Margaret to add a lover to a husband. The literary merits of this otherwise reprehensible performance are considerable; it is also an authority on cosmetics. Sperone Speroni, eminent for the dignity of his life and the elegance of his style, has the further honour of having first employed the dialogue in the discussion of purely ethical questions. Lodovico Dolce and A. F. Doni, industrious *littérateurs*, obtained a reputation in their own day which posterity has not ratified. The former, says Tiraboschi, wrote much in every style and well in none; the latter is tersely characterised by Niceron as "grand diseur de riens." Far superior is GIOVANNI BATTISTA GELLI, the learned tailor of Florence, who had the great advantage over the other moralists of being able to clothe his wit and wisdom in an objective form. In his *Circe*, Ulysses is represented as unsuccessfully endeavouring to persuade his metamorphosed companions to reassume human shape. They know better, and their

argumentation might well have suggested the machinery of Dryden's *Hind and Panther;* even as that of Gelli's *Capricci*, where Giusto disputes with his own soul, was very probably copied in Smollett's *Adventures of an Atom.*

One of the most characteristic writers of the time is AGNOLO FIRENZUOLA (1497–1547), an authority "on the form and colour of the ear, and the proper way of wearing ornamental flowers," whose elegant and frequently licentious stories, idiomatically Tuscan in style, fresh in humour, and brilliant in description, are interwoven with his *Dialoghi d'Amore*, and who also gained fame by his comedies, and as the translator, or rather adapter, of Apuleius. As the combination of the photographic portraits of several members of any class of society gives the mean average of its physiognomy, so Firenzuola represents the average constitution of such men of letters of his day as wrote with a real vocation for literature. It is doubtful whether any such vocation can be credited to another satirist who greatly surpassed him in celebrity, the notorious PIETRO ARETINO (1492–1556). Aretino was merely a literary blackmailer, whose profligate and venal pen was employed to extort or cajole money from the great men of the age. His indubitable success is difficult to understand, except as the irrepressible and irreversible decree of fashion. Apart from his comedies and his letters, an amazing record of the abasement of rank before impudence, only one of his works has any literary merit, and the genuineness of this is questionable. His other immoralities are as insipid as his moralities, and his personalities are of the kind best answered by a cudgel. Notwithstanding, he became a power in public life as well as in literature, rivalled the opulence and the pomp of his

friend Titian, and, like him, trained up disciples of his craft. The charm may have lain in some measure in the boldness of the man, who alone in his age made a show of free speech, although the real motor of his pen was cupidity, who lived libelling, and died laughing. Worthless as he was, he might have anticipated Pope's boast that men not afraid of God were afraid of him.

Aretino is only one among a host of letter-writers, who included the most accomplished men of the age. Bembo appears as its typical representative, here as elsewhere, although the unfortunate historian Bonfadio is held to have written best. All wrote with an eye to the publication of their epistles, and asked themselves what Cicero would have said in their place. None had the delightful candour and exuberance of Petrarch ; they are in consequence much less national, interesting, and human ; and their letters, stripped of the complimentary phrases which eke them out, are in general brief. Yet it would be hard to refuse any among them the praise due to two excellent qualities, good style and good sense. Such were the general characteristics of the age, a period, but for Ariosto, almost devoid of creative power in letters, yet fully worthy to be ranked with the other great eras of artificial literature, the eras of Augustus, and Anne, and Louis XIV. Its truest praise is perhaps afforded by a comparison of it with the other contemporary literatures of Europe, then, the French excepted, which is immensely indebted to the Italian, almost equally destitute of genius and of art, although the magnificent rhythm of English prose even then showed what an instrument had been provided for performers yet to come. But temporal and spiritual tyranny were fast

destroying the elementary requisites of great literature in Italy. The hare was lamed, and the tortoises were overtaking her. A little while yet, and it would be needful to look beyond Alp and sea for the true Italy, and find her in the bosoms of Shakespeare, Spenser, and Sidney.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PETRARCHISTS

WE have seen that the definite result of the literary ferment which accompanied the revival of vernacular Italian literature after the long torpor of the fifteenth century was the recognition of literary form, rather than intellectual substance, as the principal object of cultivation, a conclusion completely in harmony with the national genius as well as the national traditions. Had this been otherwise, revolt would soon have made itself evident. On the contrary, however, we meet with scarcely any manifestation of the existence of a romantic spirit in Italian literature until Manzoni begins to be inspired by Scott and Byron, and Foscolo by Rousseau. The consequence is a great lack of richness and variety in comparison with a literature like the English, where all descriptions of tendencies have been allowed ample scope, and now one, now another, has successively seemed to be predominant; but none, except now and then for a time, has attained an absolute mastery.

On the other hand, the devotion of the Italian writers to elegance and symmetry of composition has rendered their literature a model for cultured writers in all languages, has deeply influenced contemporary literatures in their rudimentary stages, and has preserved many a writer from oblivion whose original power was not conspicuous,

whose themes have long since become antiquated, but who still challenges the attention of posterity by charm of style. "Cela qui n'est pas écrit ne dure pas" is a rule without exception, and the converse is often, though not always, true also. One highly important class of these writers is that large section of the poets who modelled themselves avowedly on the greatest master of style their literature possessed or possesses, the man whose thoughts, often most precious in themselves, are displayed to incomparable advantage by incomparable felicity of expression.

Very few Italian lyrical poets of the sixteenth century ventured to stray far from the traces of Petrarch, who became to them what Virgil and Homer and Ovid had necessarily become to writers in Latin verse. Had Petrarch excelled in epic as he excelled in lyric, Ariosto and Tasso too would have been his humble followers, and the whole of the poetical literature of the age would have been imitative, and consequently second-rate. Yet, although the mass of this derivative literature is intolerably empty and insipid, much is distinguished by a perfection of expression which makes it not merely delightful reading but a valuable study. The poets frequently seem to approach Petrarch very nearly, but none reproduce him. Those succeed best whose imitation is the least avowed, and who are most remote from their model in native temperament, such as Tansillo; on the other hand, Bembo, Molza, and their like, who in mere form have most nearly approached Petrarch by most completely suppressing their own individuality, present much less to interest modern readers, although their contemporaries, estimating them from another point of view, extolled them to the skies.

Bembo and Molza, nevertheless, only followed in the

track of the gifted man whom we have already seen so influential in the development of Italian prose—Jacopo Sannazaro. Sannazaro's attention was, indeed, principally given to Latin poetry. But the qualifications of an eminent Latinist and of a pattern Petrarchist were much the same. Both abdicated all claim to originality by setting before themselves a model which it was taken for granted—and with justice—that they would be for ever unable to rival. Sannazaro was, notwithstanding, something more than a master of felicitous expression. His Virgilian *De Partu Virginis*, in which he vied with the chief contemporary writers of Latin hexameters, Vida and Fracastoro, is less attractive than his elegies, into which he has introduced more of personal feeling, or his Piscatorian Eclogues, in which he has successfully revived the form, if not the spirit, of ancient composition, and from which Milton did not disdain to borrow ornaments for *Lycidas*. As a follower of Petrarch, Sannazaro stands on a different footing from Bembo and Molza. Their excellence in their own way is indisputable, but monotonous: they neither rise nor sink; every poem of theirs is just as good as every other poem. Sannazaro, a man of noble character and strong feeling, imports a personal note into his poetry, and succeeds in proportion to the clearness with which he can render this audible. His praise of Petrarch's Laura, for instance, is something more than conventionality, and these lines, *Mors et Vita*, translated by Glassford, express the sum of much serious meditation:

> "*Alas! when I behold this empty show*
> *Of life, and think how soon it shall have fled;*
> *When I consider how the honoured head*
> *Is daily struck by death's mysterious blow,*

My heart is wasted like the melting snow,
And hope, that comforter, is nearly dead;
Seeing these wings have been so long outspread,
And yet so sluggish is my flight and low.
But if I therefore should complain and weep—
If chide with love, or fortune, or the fair—
No cause I have; myself must bear it all,
Who, like a man 'mid trifles lulled to sleep,
With death beside me, feed on empty air,
Nor think how soon this mouldering garb must fall."

Among Sannazaro's contemporaries, a little too early to have imbibed the full spirit of the Petrarchan revival, may be especially named Antonio Tebaldeo (1463–1537), an admired poet who survived his reputation; Serafino dell' Aquila, imitated by Wyat, whose Neapolitan vehemence betrayed his lively talent into bombast; Antonio Cammelli, the political laureate of the Ferrarese court; Antonello Petrucci, who wrote as Damocles banqueted, with the headsman's axe suspended over him; Notturno Neapolitano; and Filosseno, chiefly remarkable for the undisguised gallantry of his sonnets addressed to Lucrezia Borgia.

Bembo was a model man of letters, to whom in this capacity the Italian language and Italian culture are infinitely beholden. As a poet he is perhaps best characterised by the forty drawers through which he is said to have successively passed his sonnets, making some alteration for the better in every one of them. If there had been any originality in any of them, this would hardly have survived the twentieth drawer, but there never had been, and since the polish was always meant to be the merit, there hardly could be too much polishing. Bembo's poetry at all events serves to refute the heresy which identifies genius with industry; and if we admit with

Roscoe that "any person of good taste and extensive reading might, *by a due portion of labour*, produce works of equal merit," we must nevertheless allow that it will probably be long ere such a capacity for labour reappears. He entirely fulfilled the requirements of his own age, by which he was simply idolised. The quintessence of his contemporaries' admiration is concentrated in Vittoria Colonna's humble yet dignified remonstrance with him for having failed to celebrate the death of her husband:

> "*Unkind was Fate, prohibiting the rays*
> *Of my great Sun your kindling soul to smite;*
> *For thus in perpetuity more bright*
> *Your fame had been, more glorious his praise.*
> *His memory, exalted in your lays,*
> *That ancient times obscure, and ours delight,*
> *Had 'scaped in fell Oblivion's despite*
> *The second death, that on the spirit preys.*
> *If in your bosom might infusèd be*
> *My ardour, or my pen as yours inspired,*
> *Great as the dead should be the elegy.*
> *But now I fear lest Heaven with wrath be fired;*
> *Toward you, for overmuch humility;*
> *Toward me, who have too daringly aspired.*"

Bembo's Latin poetry, of which charming specimens may be seen in Symonds's *Renaissance*, is better than his Italian, for it does not disappoint. The fame of FRANCESCO MARIA MOLZA (1489–1544) was in his day hardly second to Bembo's, and was based on much the same grounds. Like Bembo, he was an elegant Latin poet, who carried the maxims appropriate for composition in a dead language into a living one. Like Bembo's, his vernacular poems, with one remarkable exception, are models of diction as inexpressive as harmonious—a perpetual silvery

chime which soothes the ear, but conveys nothing to the mind. The exception is a poem in which the usual vagueness and emptiness of sentiment assumes substance from its pastoral setting. The *Ninfa Tiberina*, in which one of Molza's innumerable light loves is idealised as a shepherdess, is just such a piece of mosaic as Gray's Elegy. The author has amassed all the commonplaces of pastoral poetry, and, without adding a single idea of his own, has combined them into so rich and glowing a picture that he may well claim to have superseded the entire school of pastoral versifiers, the few excepted who have derived their inspiration from Nature, like his predecessor Politian. "Molza is to Politian," says Symonds, "as the rose to the rosebud." He was born at Modena, but lived chiefly at Rome, leaving his wife and family in his native city. They would indeed have been much in the way, for he was continually involved in some amour, and his irregular ties ultimately proved fatal to him. He was a leading member of the brilliant literary circles of Rome and Florence, and as a companion and a man of letters his contemporaries have nothing but praise for him.

Petrarch is a poet as much within the scope of imitation as beyond the pursuit of rivalry. The swarms of Petrarchists stun the ear and darken the light of the period: Tansillo might well say that every hillock had grown a Parnassus. They may be found in the thesaurus of Dolce, a series whose continuous publication for so many years at all events affords proof that this appetite for imitative verse was not factitious. Some few stand forth from the crowd by some exceptional characteristics, and it is of these only that

we can speak. The first of these in chronological order is BERNARDO TASSO (1493–1568), whom we have already met as the author of the *Amadigi*. In his lyrical as in his epical attempts, Tasso is one of those provoking poets who are always trembling on the verge of excellence, ever good, hardly ever quite good enough. Even the famous sonnet on his renunciation of his lady, which, Dolce tells us, thrilled Italy, is less eminent for the beauty of the poetry than the nobility of the sentiment. Once, however, straying within the domain of pastoral poetry, he found and polished a gem worthy of the Greek Anthology :

> "*The herb and floweret of my verdant shore,*
> *Shepherd, thy pasturing flock's possession be;*
> *And thine the olive and the mulberry*
> *That mantle these fair hillocks o'er and o'er.*
> *But be my fountain's fresh and sparkling store*
> *Of gushing waters undisturbed by thee,*
> *For they are vowed to Muses' ministry,*
> *And whoso drinks is poet evermore.*
> *Solely for these and for Apollo fit,*
> *And Loves and Nymphs the sacred stream doth burst,*
> *Or haply some fair swan may drink of it;*
> *But thou, if not a swain untutored, first*
> *Thy dues to Love in melody acquit,*
> *Then with the bubbling coolness quench thy thirst.*"

Another poet of the time vies with Bernardo Tasso in nobility of character, evinced in his case by the fervour of his patriotism. The bulk of the verse of GUIDO GUIDICCIONI, Bishop of Fossombrone (1500–41), consists of insipid love-strains in the style of Bembo and Molza; but when he touches upon the wrongs and misfortunes of his country he becomes inspired, and speaks in tones of alternate majesty and pathos, to

which the following sonnet superadds the charms of fancy:

"*The Arno and the Tiber and the Po*
This sad lament and heavy plaint of mine
I hear, for solely I my ear incline,
Accompany with music sad and low.
No more Heaven's light on sunny wave doth glow,
No more the dwindled lamps of virtue shine;
Dark western tempests, dank and foul with brine,
Have swept the meads and laid the flowerets low.
The myrtle, Rivers, and the laurel-spray,
Delight and diadem of chosen souls,
And sacred shrines the blast hath borne away:
No more unto the sea your torrent rolls
Exulting, or your Naiades display
Their snowy breasts and shining aureoles."

If other Italian poets felt like Guidiccioni, they shunned to give their sentiments utterance. The chief original poem of ANNIBALE CARO (1507–66), the accomplished translator of Virgil and Longus, and one of the best letter-writers of his age, was a panegyric on the house of Valois—*Venite all' ombra dei gran gigli d'oro* ("*Hither, where spread the golden fleurs-de-lis*"). A few years later, with equal genius and equal insensibility to the part that became an Italian, Caro turned to celebrate the Spanish conqueror. Whatever may be thought of the theme of his poem, it is in execution one of the great things of Italian poetry:

"*Here the Fifth Charles reposes, at whose name*
Eyes of superbest monarchs seek the ground,
Whom Story's tongue and Honour's trump resound,
Quelling all loudest blasts of meaner fame.
How hosts and legioned chiefs he overcame,
Kings, but for him invincible, discrowned,
Swayed realms beyond Imagination's bound,
And his own mightier soul did rule and tame—

This knows the admiring world, and this the Sun,
That did with envy and amazement see
His equal course with equal glory run
Wide earth around; which now accomplished, he,
From heaven observant of the world he won,
Smiling inquires, 'And toiled I thus for thee?'"

GIOVANNI DELLA CASA (1500–56) emulated Caro in the nobility of his style, which would scarcely have been expected, considering the licentious character of some of his verse and his ecclesiastical profession. He does, however, sometimes attain a dignity and gravity which, apart from the beauty of his diction, lift him high out of the crowd of Petrarchists; nor are his themes invariably amorous. His *Galateo*, a treatise on politeness, has earned him the name of the Italian Chesterfield. He would have attained greater eminence as a man of letters but for the distractions of politics and business, which he deplores in the following sonnet:

"*To woodland fount or solitary cave*
In sunlit hour I plained my amorous teen;
Or wove by light of Luna's lamp serene
My song, while yet to song and love I clave;
Nor by thy side the sacred steep to brave
Refused, where rarely now is climber seen;
But cares and tasks ungrateful intervene,
And like the weed I drift upon the wave.
And idly thus my barren hours are spent
In realms of fountain and of laurel void,
Where but vain tinsel is accounted blest.
Forgive, then, if not wholly unalloyed
My pleasure to behold thee eminent
On pinnacle no other foot hath prest."

ANGELO DI COSTANZO (1507–91), already noticed as an historian, is another example of a writer of sonnets who

rose from the crowd by the individuality which he contrived to impress upon his performances. His great characteristic is an exquisite elegance, not, as in some other instances, veiling inanity, but usually the accompaniment of something well worth saying. The following piece is a good instance of his power of enhancing, by ingenious embellishment, a thought interesting and attractive in itself:

"*River, that from thy Apennine recess,*
Swollen with surge of tributary snow,
Com'st foaming, and thy tawny overflow
Hurlest on Samnian vales with headlong stress;
Thy farther shore, where Love awaits to bless,
I seek, and by thy wrath unharmed would go;
If thou intendest not my overthrow,
With stringent curb thy furious flood repress.
But art thou verily resolved to kill,
And purposest that this conclusive day
Shall jointly terminate my good and ill,
Grant me but once to stem thy shock and spray:
My happy errand I would fain fulfil;
Me going spare, returning sweep away."

The general passion for verse naturally extended to the refined and accomplished ladies of the time. Only two, however, have gained a permanent position in Italian literature, as much by their characters as by their poetry. The muse of VITTORIA COLONNA (1490–1547) chiefly prompted the apotheosis of her husband, the Marquis of Pescara, "a sworded man whose trade was blood," and who, though a great captain, scarcely possessed a single amiable or magnanimous trait of character. The pathos of the situation surpasses that of the verse which it called forth. As a woman, Vittoria evoked the enthusiastic admiration of her contem-

poraries, and lives for posterity more in the strains of Michael Angelo than in her own.

The unhappy fate of GASPARA STAMPA (1524–53), who literally died of love, would have preserved her name without her verse; she was, nevertheless, a true poetess, and might have been a great one had she not, like so many poetesses, struck upon the fatal rock of fluency. Could her centuries of sonnets be concentrated into a dozen, she would rank high.

More truly a poet than any of the stricter Petrarchists is a Neapolitan, LUIGI TANSILLO, although his advantage is rather intensity of feeling than superiority in the poetic art. He must indeed be admitted to have derogated in some measure from the high standard of taste then generally prevalent, and to have foreshadowed, though but in a very trifling degree, the extravagances of the seventeenth century. This may be forgiven to his southern ardour and liveliness, and foreign critics are not likely to perceive the little technical defects so severely visited upon him by his countrymen. He had the unspeakable advantage over his competitors of being devoted to no ideal nymph, but to a real and very great and very cold lady, the Marchioness del Vasto, wife of the Viceroy of Naples. Such an attachment was necessarily Platonic on his part, and imaginary, if so much, on the lady's. The first rapture is magnificently expressed in the sonnet in which the poor knight and military retainer, whose business in life was to help in clearing the Mediterranean of Turks, compares his rash love to the flight of Icarus:

"*Now that my wings are spread to my desire,*
The more vast height withdraws the dwindling land,
Wider to wind these pinions I expand,

And earth disdain, and higher mount and higher:
Nor of the fate of Icarus inquire,
Nor cautious droop, or sway to either hand;
Dead I shall fall, full well I understand;
But who lives gloriously as I expire?
Yet hear I my own heart that pleading cries,
Stay, madman, whither art thou bound? descend!
Ruin is ready Rashness to chastise.
But I, Fear not, though this indeed the end;
Cleave we the clouds, and praise our destinies,
If noble fall on noble flight attend."

Suspicion, jealousy, bitterly wounded feeling, open breach, and hollow reconciliation make up the remainder of the sonnets, the best of which have few superiors in any literature for fire and passion. His other poetical performances are far from inconsiderable. The best known is the sin of his youth, the *Vendemmiatore*, whose ultra-Fescennine truth to rustic manners and the licence of the vintage brought it into the Index, and its author into gaol. In quite a different key are his delightful didactic poems, *Il Podere*, on the management of an estate, and *La Balia*, on the care of children, translated by Roscoe. Some of his familiar *Capitoli* are very pleasing, and some of his miscellaneous poems are very fine, especially this on the Spaniards slain by the Turks at Castel Nuovo, on the coast of Dalmatia:

"*Hail, scene of fated Valour's final stand,*
Revered for these sad heaps of whitening bone,
Their trace who other monument have none,
Pyreless and tombless on this desert strand;
Who hitherward from far Iberian land
To Adria's shores on blast of battle blown,
With streaming blood of foemen, and their own,
Came to empurple foreign sea and sand.

Three hundred Fabii gave immortal name
To ancient Tiber; what to Spain by death
Heroic of three thousand shall be given?
Greater the host, more excellent the aim
Of warrior martyrs; those their dying breath
Resigned to Italy, and these to heaven."

The graceful poets who thus tuned their harps to the notes of Petrarch sang within the hearing of a spirit of another sort, whose verses, had they known them, they would have compared unfavourably with their own elegance, but whose appearance in their circle would have been like that of Victor Hugo's Pan at the banquet of the Olympians. MICHAEL ANGELO, the greatest Italian after Dante, had not, like Dante, acquired the secret of poetic form. He indites as on marble with mallet and chisel; but the inscription is everlasting. "Ungrammatical, rude in versification, crabbed or obscure in thought," as Symonds describes them, Michael Angelo's sonnets are yet priceless as a revelation of the man, more distinct than that vouchsafed by his painting or sculpture. These tell of his tremendous force; the deep springs of tenderness in his nature are only to be learned from the poems, the most important of which are consecrated to Love, now ideal and impersonal, now expending itself upon some fair object, masculine or feminine, but in either case Platonic. Vittoria Colonna and Tommaso de' Cavalieri are the objects of the poet's deepest attachment. The following sonnet was most probably inscribed to Cavalieri:

"By your eyes' aid a gentle light I see,
Which but for these mine own would never share;
By your auxiliar feet a load I bear
Which my lame limbs refuse to bear for me.

I, plumeless, yet upon your pinions flee;
When heaven I seek, your soul conducts me there;
Blushes or pallor at your will I wear;
Sun chills and winter warms at your decree.
The fashion of your will prescribeth mine;
My thought hath in your thinking taken birth;
My speech gives voice to your discourse unspoken.
A sunless moon that by herself would shine,
I were without you; only seen on earth
By light of sun that on her dark hath broken."

The roughness of Michael Angelo's verse was planed down by the first editor, his great-nephew, and the true text has only been retrieved in our time.

Two religious poets stand aloof from the class of Petrarchists, rather by the nature of their themes than the quality of their talent. CELIO MAGNO, a religious poet of Protestant tendencies, produced a hymn to the Almighty which ranks among the best canzoni of the period, and had anticipated Coleridge's project, which with him as with Coleridge remained a project, for a series of similar compositions. GABRIELE FIAMMA, Bishop of Chioggia, is in general a tame versifier, but in two inspired moments produced two of the most beautiful sonnets in the language: one of which is remarkable for expressing in an ornate style the thought of Heine's famous lyric, "Mein Herz gleicht ganz dem Meere"; the other, apart from its great beauty, as an instance of a sonnet which, beginning apparently in a commonplace style, is vivified through and through by the last tercet:

"*Never with such delight the bee in spring,*
When the full mead teems with the novel flower,
The sweetness of the honey-burdened bower
Amasses for her cell in wayfaring;

Not with like joy, when glades cease echoing
The baying hound, no more compelled to cower
In covert, doth the hind the forest scour,
Panting for crystal rivulet or spring:
As I the sob acclaim that signifies
Passion of love or awe divinely given,
Or other ecstasy that God endears.
Transported with her bliss the spirit cries;
How vast his rapture who inhabits heaven,
If joy he hath more joyful than these tears!"

The Cinque Cento period of Italian poetry, which to the men of that day seemed the *ne plus ultra* of artistic achievement, has since received less praise and exerted less influence than fairly its due. It was a great thing to have produced works so perfect in form, and to have refined the language in so eminent a degree. The general belief, too, that the Italian poetry of this age was devoid of all but formal excellence involves a great exaggeration. It is true that the literature of the period is overloaded with masses of mechanical and conventional stuff, but Guidiccioni and Casa and Tansillo are capable on occasion of expressing themselves with an energy the more impressive from being restrained within the limits prescribed by a chastened taste, and many Italian sonnets are even better fitted to be breathed from the trumpet than warbled to the lute. A great development in this direction might have been expected, but for the extinction of political and spiritual liberty.

What the Italian lyric might have become we see in Milton, who could have written neither his *Lycidas* nor his sonnets without Tuscan models. He undoubtedly weighted, without overweighting, both canzone and sonnet with thought to a degree unparalleled in Italy, but how much he owed to Italians appears by a comparison of

I, plumeless, yet upon your pinions flee;
When heaven I seek, your soul conducts me there;
Blushes or pallor at your will I wear;
Sun chills and winter warms at your decree.
The fashion of your will prescribeth mine;
My thought hath in your thinking taken birth;
My speech gives voice to your discourse unspoken.
A sunless moon that by herself would shine,
I were without you; only seen on earth
By light of sun that on her dark hath broken."

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"Never with such delight [illegible]
When the full [illegible]
The sweetness of the [illegible]
Amazes for her all in wayfaring;

[redacted]

his sonnets with those of Wordsworth, who neglected the traditions which Milton carefully observed. Wordsworth has even more ripeness of thought and moral elevation than his predecessor; but while Milton's work is immaculate, Wordsworth's is full of flaws.

With all its defects, the poetry of the Cinque Cento will survive as a proof that rules of art exist and may be ascertained, and cannot be safely departed from; no less than as an example of the embellishment which even ordinary thoughts may receive from nobility of diction and breadth of style; and as an instance of the great part which a literature not too original or too racy of the native soil may play in moulding and enriching the literatures of neighbouring and less advanced nations. Nor can it be fairly judged by itself as an isolated phenomenon. It was a part, and far from the most important part, of a stupendous artistic movement, which spoke more readily and eloquently with brush and chisel than with pen, and expressed through their medium much that in an age more exclusively literary would have been committed to paper.

CHAPTER XV

HUMOROUS POETRY—THE MOCK-HEROIC

NUMEROUS as are the poets we have briefly passed in review, many more might have been added whom it would have been agreeable to have met in the barren fifteenth century. The Renaissance had by this time entered into the blood of Italy, and produced one of the best effects of impregnation with the classical spirit—a passion for fame. This we find as constantly assigned as a motive of action in public affairs in that day as humanitarian inducements are in ours; and when it is considered that the sincerity of the former motive is much less questionable than that of the latter, it is not clear that the comparison is wholly to the advantage of the nineteenth century. Almost every man of any mark was deeply influenced by it, and it was one of the most potent instruments in stimulating both literary and artistic production. The drawback was that the aspirant to fame was naturally inclined to take the easiest and most fashionable path, and thus the same impulse which braced effort suppressed originality.

The sentiment of an age mainly under the sway of Petrarch naturally encouraged the production of lyrical poetry, and other styles were neglected in comparison. Apart from the epical attempts which have been mentioned, and the dramatic and humorous poems to which

allusion remains to be made, the period has little to show apart from the lyric, with the exception of some didactic poems — the *Balía* and the *Podere* of Luigi Tansillo, the *Nautica* of Baldi, the *Caccia* of Valvasone, and two others modelled after Virgil, the *Coltivazione* of Luca Alamanni, and the *Api* of Giovanni Rucellai, both excellent examples of the description of poetry which owes most to artifice and least to inspiration. This might perhaps pass for a general character of the poetry of the period, which ranks with the ages of Augustus and Anne as an example of what exquisite culture can and cannot effect in the absence of creative power. It was of high value to succeeding periods by bequeathing to them a norm and standard of good taste by which to chasten their frequent aberrations; and, notwithstanding its almost academical character, it was actually in vital relation with the literary appetite of its limited but highly accomplished public. There was not, says Dolce, a cultivated person in Italy who could not repeat before it was in print Bernardo Tasso's sonnet resigning his mistress to his successful rival, a fact which proves not only the existence of a general appreciation of poetry independent of the machinery of reviewing and the printing-press itself, but also a general preference for its most refined and dignified examples.

The didactic poems of which we have spoken claim the less attention, inasmuch as they were in no respect national. The rules for good didactic poetry are the same in all languages, and any accomplished versifier will instruct in agriculture or the chase in much the same manner in any country, however his local colouring may vary with his climate. It is otherwise with satirical, familiar, and mock-heroic poetry. In all these

styles Italian work is individual and characteristic. Satiric traits are frequent enough in the contemporaries of Dante, and from one point of view Dante himself may be regarded as a great satirist. The professed satire, nevertheless, of modern Italy derives from Horace rather than Juvenal; it aims at good-humoured raillery rather than scathing vehemence or corroding virulence; and its impetus is further moderated by its being generally composed in the easy and garrulous *terza rima*. Alessandro Vinciguerra (born 1480) appears to have first imparted this stamp; but the great exemplar is Ariosto, whose satires are not the least ornament of his poetic crown, yielding little in facetious urbanity to his model Horace.

The vigorous satires of Luigi Alamanni, imitated in English by Sir Thomas Wyat, evince a remarkable freedom of speech. Bentivoglio, Aretino, Anguillara, and other writers of note followed in his track with varying success. The first to employ blank verse in satire was Lodovico Paterno, who is perhaps more exceptionally distinguished for having achieved an epithalamium to Queen Mary of England without the least allusion to her restoration of the Roman Catholic religion. The *Decennali* of Machiavelli, a highly-condensed sketch in verse of the events of his time, may also be regarded as a satire; but his reputation as a poet rather arises from his *Capitoli*, disquisitions in verse in which Tansillo and many others also excelled, and whose easy familiarity is hardly to be paralleled in any other literature, and from his elegant versification of portions of Apuleius's *Golden Ass*. FRANCESCO COPPETTA (1510–1554), an excellent writer of sonnets, extended the domain of poetry by constituting himself the first laureate of the feline species. His ode on the loss of his cat (*di tutta la*

Soria gloria e splendore, and consequently an Angora) is a curious blending of parodies of Petrarch with genuine feeling. He eventually finds comfort in the conclusion that the object of his affections has been appropriated by Jupiter and placed among the constellations. Two brilliant stars never seen before have of late been observable in the firmament, and the inference is obvious.

Ariosto and Machiavelli, nevertheless, although geniuses of the first order, rank in familiar poetry below FRANCESCO BERNI, better equipped for it by nature and entirely devoted to its practice. Berni, born at Lamporecchio, near Florence, about 1497, was a dependant of the Medici, successively attached to Cardinal Bibbiena and to Bishop Ghiberti, Papal datary. His life was consequently for a long time spent at Rome, where he enjoyed the friendship of the most eminent men of letters of the period, executed the remodelled version of Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* by which his name is best known, and produced the numerous *Capitoli*, which would stand high as examples of easy familiar verse, were it not for their frequent indecency. They gave the pattern of the style (*Bernesque*) which has derived its name from him, and in which he has had many successors, but no absolute rival. Humour, as Roscoe remarks, is very local. Berni loses much, not merely by translation, but on perusal by a foreigner. It is enough for his fame if he continues to be appreciated in his own country, and that nothing worse happens to him abroad than must equally happen to the author of a *Hudibras* or a *Jobsiad*. How well some portions of his work lend themselves to translation in congenial hands may appear from a specimen, rendered by Leigh Hunt, of the poem whose subject is the author's own

prodigious laziness. His portrait of himself is very lifelike, and probably very accurate:

"*The man, for all that, was a happy man;*
Thought not too much; indulged no gloomy fit;
Folks wished him well. Prince, peasant, artisan,
Every one loved him; for the rogue had wit,
And knew how to amuse. His fancy ran
On thousands of odd things which he had writ:
Certain mad waggeries in the shape of poems,
With strange elaborations of their proems.

Choleric he was withal, when fools reproved him;
Free of his tongue, as he was frank of heart;
Ambition, avarice, neither of these moved him;
True to his word; caressing without art;
A lover to excess of those that loved him;
Yet, if he met with hate, could play a part
Which showed the fiercest he had found his mate;
Still he was proner far to love than hate.

In person he was big, yet tight and lean,
Had long thin legs, big nose, and a large face;
Eyebrows which there was little space between;
Deep-set, blue eyes; and beard in such good case
That the poor eyes would scarcely have been seen
Had it been suffered to forget its place;
But, not approving beards to that amount,
The owner brought it to a sharp account."

Berni's death did him more honour than his life. The suppressed dedication to the twentieth canto of his *Orlando* seems to prove that he had become serious in his later years, and fallen under Protestant influences; but this was unknown to Cardinal Cibo, who deemed him the right sort of man to commend a poisoned chalice to the lips of Cardinal Salviati; and his refusal, there is every reason to believe, cost him his own life (1535). He died with strong symptoms of poison, was

buried hastily without epitaph or monument, and, although his works were collected, nothing was said of the author. This sudden silence corroborates the suspicion of his Protestantism.

Berni's chief characteristics as a poet are graceful ease and perfect mastery of style and diction. He is fluent and entirely unembarrassed, never at a loss for the right word, and handles the difficult *terza rima* with the facility of prose. This command of language would have raised him high if he had possessed any of the elements of greatness; but he is incapable of elevated sentiment, and has the good sense never to aspire to it. What is most admirable in him, his poetical gift apart, is the evident sincerity and consistency of his Epicurean view of life, and his eupeptic sanity. As regards his strictly original compositions, he occupies about the same position in Italian poetry as Goldsmith would have filled in English if he had written nothing but *Retaliations* and *Haunches of Venison*. In his *rifacimento* of Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* he has attempted something more considerable, and, from his own point of view, with much success. Modern taste will hardly sympathise with his disfigurement of the romantic grace and simple sincerity of the original, for the mere sake of heightening the comic element and improving its style. In his own day men thought differently, and it must be admitted that the disparity between Boiardo's comparatively unadorned groundwork and the brilliant superstructure of Ariosto marred the continuity of the *Orlando* as a whole, and that the chasm may well have seemed to require filling up. Berni could not impart the special qualities of Ariosto, but he could bring Boiardo's style more nearly up to Ariosto's level, and he could adorn his original by

graceful introductions to the respective cantos. Both these objects have been achieved with taste and success; and although Boiardo's comparatively artless composition is still the best, as nearest to Nature, it cannot be denied that Berni's alterations must have appeared to his contemporaries great improvements, and that his embellishments may be read with abundant pleasure. Conscious of his lack of poetical invention, he has abstained from interfering with the narrative. His work was not published until after his death, and there is reason to suspect that it was considerably adulterated by or at the instance of the great literary bully of the day, Pietro Aretino.

It does not appear that Berni had any intention of parodying the *Orlando Innamorato* in his *rifacimento;* he simply wished to bring it, in his conception, nearer to the literary level of the continuation which had superseded it, and deemed that this could be best effected by an infusion of humour and satire. It would be a still greater error to assume, with some modern Italian critics, an intention on the part of Boiardo and Ariosto of parodying the old chivalric romance. They merely desired to adapt it to the spirit of their own age, as Tennyson has adapted the *Morte d'Arthur* to ours, and their sprightliness is the correlative of his moral earnestness. Ariosto is less reverent of his original than Boiardo, but he keeps within bounds. The great success of his poem, however, was sure to evolve a *bona-fide* parodist, as in our day Mark Twain has capered with cap and bells in the wake of Tennyson. The Italian Mark Twain was TEOFILO FOLENGO (1491–1544), known under his pseudonym of *Merlinus Cocaius* as a distinguished cultivator of macaronic poetry, a by-path of literature which we

are compelled to leave unexplored. He was a dissipated runaway monk, who repented, became serious, and resought his cell just as he seemed within an ace of turning Protestant. His *Orlandino* is a burlesque upon the poems of chivalry, with pieces of genuine poetry interspersed, and many digressions on the corruptions of the age, especially the vices of the religious orders. It is unfinished. What was published is said to have been written in three months, a statement confirmed by the energy of the verse.

It was a great step in Greek comedy when the mythological parodies which had constituted the substance of the middle comedy were replaced by the picture of contemporary manners which formed the staple of the new. So great an advance could not be made by ALESSANDRO TASSONI (1565–1638), the chief representative of serio-comic poetry in the seventeenth century, for his age would not have tolerated it; but he effected much in the same direction by converting the mere parody of the chivalric romance which had satisfied his predecessors into the mock-heroic epic, a form of literature which, if he did not invent, he may claim to have perfected. Instead of contriving burlesque variations upon Ariosto, he took a real incident of a serio-comic nature—the war which in the thirteenth century had actually broken out between the republics of Modena and Bologna respecting a bucket carried off by the former. The treatment is admirable; the characters, some of whom are historical, and others sketched after Tassoni's contemporaries, have an air of reality altogether wanting to the personages of Folengo's parodies; there is enough of idyllic charm and tender pathos here and there to approve the writer a true poet, while humour domi-

nates, and many of the sarcasms are really profound. A more biting irony on the wretched dissensions which had been the ruin of Italy cannot be conceived; and, notwithstanding a subordinate purpose of deriding Tasso's languid imitators, and the personal quarrel which prompted composition in the first instance, such was probably the main purpose of the writer, in his political sentiments and aspirations a statesman of the type of Machiavelli and Guicciardini, who burned with hatred of the Spanish oppressor, but, except for the two Philippics he composed in demonstration of the real hollowness of the Spanish power, could find no other vent for his patriotism than his poetry, and wasted his life in the service of petty princes. *La Secchia Rapita* (*The Rape of the Bucket*) was published under a pseudonym at Paris in 1622, having long circulated in manuscript. Tassoni also showed himself a bold if bilious critic of Petrarch, against whose predominance a reaction was declaring itself, and participated in the general anti-Aristotelian movement of his times by a volume of miscellaneous reflections.

A contemporary of Tassoni is usually named along with him as a master of the heroi-comic style, but is in every respect greatly his inferior. This is FRANCESCO BRACCIOLINI (1566–1645), whose pen, if he really meant to serve the Church by ridiculing the classical mythology, should have been wielded a century sooner. Part of the humour of his *Scherno degli Dei* consists in the unconscious anachronism. It manifests considerable fertility of invention, and has survived the author's four epics, placed as these were immediately after Tasso's by good judges in his own day. The *Malmantile Racquistato* of Lorenzo Lippi the painter, the delight

of the philologist for its idiomatic Tuscan, is remarkable for embalming much local folk-lore, and so many local phrases as to be shorter than its own glossary.

Two more recent examples of the mock-heroic epic may be included here to complete the subject. The *Ricciardetto* of NICCOLO FORTEGUERRI, published under the pseudonym of Carteromaco, has received much merited and more unmerited praise. The author (1670–1730) was a prelate of the Roman court, and so great a favourite of Pope Clement XII. that he is said to have died from mortification at having displeased his patron by neglecting to ask for a vacant appointment. His poem burlesques the chivalric epics of Ariosto and others, not with the refined raillery of a Berni, but in a style of broad, coarse buffoonery. It was published after his death, when his friends sought to extenuate its unclerical character by alleging that it had been undertaken for a wager, composed in spare intervals of time, and never designed for publication. All these statements seem to be groundless. It has considerable merit as a burlesque, and some passages indicate a talent for serious poetry which might have developed into something considerable; in the main, however, the ability displayed is of a low though drastic strain. The best idea is that of making the Saracen champion Feraù turn hermit, a character which he supports less in the fashion of St. Jerome than of Friar Tuck.

It seems an instance of apparent injustice in prevalent literary opinion that the *Ricciardetto* should be so widely known, while no less a poem than Leopardi's Supplement (*Paralipomeni*) to Homer's Battle of the Frogs and the Mice is hardly mentioned. The wonder, however, is not so great as it seems. Forteguerri wrote

what all could understand, while Leopardi only cared to please exceptional readers, and was, moreover, compelled to shroud much of his satire in obscurity for fear of the ruling powers. The allegory, nevertheless, is sufficiently transparent. The vanquished mice are the people of Italy; the frogs are the priesthood and other accomplices of the powers of darkness; the crabs, who turn the scale in the latter's favour, are the Austrians. The weakness and disunion of the oppressed, no less than the brutality of the oppressor, are depicted with the most refined sarcasm. Nothing can be more humorous, for example, than the crab's exposition to the mouse of the principle of the balance of power; and through all the fancy and drollery pierce the grief and rage of a patriotic Italian. There are also fine flashes of true poetry, especially near the end, when the adventurous mouse visits the underworld of his species; and Ariosto is parodied as well as Dante. The satire, nevertheless, transcends the appreciation of ordinary readers; and it certainly does appear somewhat singular that the fastidious author, who composed so sparingly and with such difficulty upon the most exalted themes, should have bestowed so much labour upon a *jeu d'esprit*.

CHAPTER XVI

THE NOVEL

THE novel presents one of the most remarkable examples in literary history of arrested development, and of all departments of literature is perhaps the only one which failed to attain perfection in the hands of the ancients. Great progress is indeed observable from its first artless beginnings under the Pharaohs, so recently recovered for us; but having advanced far along several lines, it becomes stationary upon all. The germ of the picaresque novel is clearly discernible in Petronius, of the novel of adventure in Apuleius, of erotic fiction in Longus; but these examples apparently remain ineffectual. Either the path is not prosecuted at all, or it leads to mere repetition. No new element appears until we encounter the chivalric romance, which in Spain produced an extensive prose literature, but in Italy ran almost entirely to verse. The more elaborate romances of Boccaccio, indeed, disclose influences from this quarter; but their reputation was slight in comparison with those short and familiar tales, commonly founded upon some anecdote and dealing with scenes and personages of real life, which prescribed the form for the national novelette. A more distinctively national type never existed. The extraordinary thing is that the nation never got beyond it. It should have seemed an obvious

advance to lengthen the stories; to stimulate surprise and suspense by greater intricacy of plot; to embellish by elaborate description; to depict character with fulness and exactness; to employ fiction for the ventilation of ideas. Precedents for all these improvements, except the last, might have been found in the classical romances, and it might have been expected that fiction would have experienced the same development as other branches of literature. On the contrary, the last Italian novelette is as far from the novel of the nineteenth century as the first, and the most powerful literary agent of good or evil, next to the equally modern newspaper, remained to be created in recent times. Whatever the defects of the Italian novel of the sixteenth century, it was nevertheless, unlike the drama, a thoroughly national form of composition, it was far in advance of anything of the kind existing elsewhere, and it exerted great influence on the literature of other countries as the general storehouse of dramatic plots.

It is no doubt to the credit of Italian novelists as artists that they did not overload their stories with didactic purpose; but this was an error which, writing mainly to amuse, they lay under little temptation to commit. None of them were endowed with creative imagination; none transcended the sphere of ordinary experience, or showed the least inclination to effect for prose fiction what Boiardo and Ariosto had accomplished for narrative poetry. Their *notti piacevoli* were not Arabian Nights. Their object of amusing could consequently only be achieved by keeping close to actual manners, and we may depend upon receiving from them a tolerably accurate picture of Italian society in so far as it suited them to present it; although the portion that

best lent itself to their objects was the most licentious and corrupt, and the loose women and salacious priests who recur in their tales from generation to generation, though by no means creatures of imagination, are still far from typical of the entire society of Italy. Like the masks of the Greek comedy, like the rakes and topers of the English comedy of the Restoration and Revolution, they are in a certain degree traditional and conventional. Modern fiction is encyclopædic: no class of the community is outside its scope. Italian fiction was eclectic, restricted by a tacit convention to what was deemed its appropriate sphere. The history of pictorial and plastic art has been reproduced in modern fiction; the property of the connoisseur has become the possession of the nation. Hence, whatever the literary merits of the Italian novelists of this period, whatever the fidelity with which they reproduce the social atmosphere of the time, their works all taken together count for less in the history of the human mind than those of a single first-class modern novelist such as Dickens or Balzac.

Boccaccio's immediate successors as novelists are FRANCO SACCHETTI and GIOVANNI FIORENTINO, already mentioned as poets of the fifteenth century. Sacchetti (1335–1410) had in his youth been a merchant, and had travelled much both in Italy and in Slavonian countries. After his return he became a Florentine magistrate, and filled some important public offices. He was a man of solid and humorous wisdom, who instructed his times, partly by religious and moral discourses, which frequently display great liberality of feeling, partly by his stories, which, apart from their literary merits, afford a valuable picture of a society half-way on the road from barbarism to civilisation. The majority are founded

on real occurrences, generally humorous, though the humour is not always as visible to us as to his contemporaries; but sometimes tragic. Some, as with Boccaccio, are derived from folk-lore in the *Gesta Romanorum* or the *Fabliaux*. All are recounted with extreme simplicity and brevity. The art of working up a single incident into a long story by subtle delineation of character, elaborate description, and ingenious plot and underplot, was then unknown.[1] Sacchetti is the straightforward *raconteur* and nothing more, but he deserves as much praise for the ease of his narrative as for the purity of his style. He can hardly be considered as an imitator of Boccaccio, who is always the poet and man of letters, while Sacchetti rather produces the impression of an ordinary Florentine gentleman telling stories after dinner with no special care for artistic effect, which nevertheless he attains by the plain good sense which bids him go straight to his subject and subordinate minor details to the really essential. His tales are single, not set in a framework like Boccaccio's.

This is not the case with his contemporary Ser Giovanni Fiorentino, author of the *Pecorone* (*Great Stupid*), who has exposed himself to ridicule by the quaintness of his introductory machinery. A friar and a nun are supposed to meet weekly in the parlour of a convent, and console themselves for the insuperable obstacles to their attachment by telling stories, upon the merits of which they compliment each other extravagantly. The tales, however, are interesting, well told, and greatly esteemed

[1] The Italian style of novel has been imitated in English in *Stories after Nature*, by Charles Wells, author of *Joseph and his Brethren*, with great success, except for Wells's deficiency in humour, and his employment of a ›etical diction than the Italians would have allowed themselves.

for the excellence of their style. Like Sacchetti's, they are mostly genuine anecdotes, or at least founded upon fact or popular tradition; some are taken with little alteration from Villani's Chronicles. Nothing is certainly known of the author, except that he began to write his tales in 1378 at the Castle of Dovadola, in compulsory or voluntary exile from his native city. He is believed to have been a notary, and a partisan of the Guelf faction.

Giovanni da Prato, author of *Il Paradin degli Alberti* (about 1420) also deserves mention here, on account of the short stories inserted into his ethical dialogues; but the first novelist of much importance after Giovanni Fiorentino is MASSUCCIO of Salerno, a Neapolitan, who seems to have been a man of rank, and to have been for some time in the service of the Duke of Milan. He wrote about 1470, and his tales were first printed in 1476. The celebrity which he continues to enjoy is, it may be feared, mainly owing to his character as the most licentious of the Italian novelists in fact, although, if we may trust his own assurance, the most virtuous in intention. His tales are divided into five parts, each of the first three of which has what the writer considers to be a distinct moral purpose. In the first, in Dunlop's words, "the scope of the stories is to show that God will sooner or later inflict vengeance on dissolute monks." The second "proves that the monks of those days invented many frauds." The third "is intended to show that the greatest and finest ladies of Italy indulged in gallantries of a nature which did them very little honour." All these propositions might have been thought susceptible of demonstration without the *Novellino*, and much better established than Massuccio's claim to a place

among moralists or reformers. He protests that his tales are "ower true," and for the most part founded on recent transactions; and, in fact, he appears less indebted than any predecessor to folk-lore and the French fabliaux. The last two sections of his work, however, contain love adventures of too exceptional a nature to be founded upon actual incidents. Some of these manifest, not merely ingenuity of invention, but considerable tragic power. The style is somewhat barbarous; and the same remark applies to the lighter fiction, generally of the nature of anecdote, of his contemporary Sabadino degli Arienti, a native and historian of Bologna. Sabadino's tales are much less objectionable than Massuccio's, though no less than his in the author's opinion *moralissimi documenti.* They are entitled *Porrettane*, from their having been composed for the amusement of the visitors to the baths of Porretta, which gives them some importance as an index to the taste of the more opulent and leisured classes of society.

The novels of the following century are exceedingly numerous, but in general too much upon one pattern to deserve especial notice until we arrive at those of Bandello, Cinthio, and Grazzini, each of whom is eminent for some special characteristic. Of Firenzuola, one of the most typical writers of his day, we have already spoken, his novelettes being generally interwoven with his other prose works. Two single novelettes by separate authors deserve special notice as world-famous, though not by the genius of their authors. The *Romeo and Giulietta* of Luigi da Porto, a gentleman of Vicenza who died in 1529, is a powerful and well-told story, although it would have been little heard of but for Shakespeare, who nevertheless seems to have been unacquainted with

it, having founded his tragedy upon the inferior version made by Arthur Brooke after the French of Boistuau. The other story which has become a portion of the world's repertory of fiction is the *Belphegor* of Giovanni Brevio, a subject also treated by Machiavelli, and revived in our own day by Thackeray. The idea of the devil's aversion to matrimony, not as a divine ordinance, but as a nuisance inconsistent with his own peace and comfort, is so irresistibly comic that one is surprised to find it originally Slavonian.

The celebrity of Pietro Aretino requires the mention of his novels, which, however, possess no very distinctive features. To find these we must turn chiefly to Straparola, whose genre requires a distinct notice; and, among those who diverged less from the beaten track, Bandello, Cinthio, and Grazzini. Bandello, says Settembrini, depicts the Italian, Grazzini the Florentine, Cinthio humanity at large.

MATTEO BANDELLO (1480–1561) was a Lombard and a Dominican, who resided successively at Mantua and at Milan, the latter city in his time one of the most uncomfortable places in Italy from the oppressions and depredations of the Spanish soldiery. Popular commotions concurred to drive him to France, where Henry II. made him Bishop of Agen. His novelettes had been composed before this distinction befell him, but his episcopacy was no obstacle to their publication in 1554. Though frequently licentious, his stories indicate a considerable advance upon his forerunners in the power of depicting character and in seriousness of tone. He prefers historical narration to invention, and usually bases his tales upon some actual occurrence, often revolting for its cruelty or indecency. The story of *Violante*,

analysed in No. 380 of the *Edinburgh Review*, is a good example of his tragic force, and many others might be given. The pathetic grace of the opening of his *Gerardo and Elena*, analysed in the same essay, is no less excellent in its more romantic and delicate way. He was a prolific writer, producing no fewer than eighty-nine novelettes, more esteemed by foreigners than by his own countrymen, who were offended by his Lombardisms. Settembrini, however, not in general favourable to the productions of the Cinque Cento, pronounces him the first Italian novelist after Boccaccio.

No imputation of rusticity can be attached to the diction of ANTONIO MARIA GRAZZINI, surnamed *Il Lasca* (1503–83), for here the style is the main recommendation of the work. Grazzini, an apothecary by profession, was one of the chief promoters of the movement for prescribing a standard of pure Tuscan, and as one of the founders of the celebrated Academy *degli Umidi*, each of whose members was bound to assume the name of some fish, he called himself *Il Lasca* (the Roach), by which name he is best known. Such toys occupied the thoughts of Italians in an age of decay when great deeds had become impossible. Grazzini's stories are mostly taken from Florentine private life, and as such have their value, apart from the idiomatic Tuscan, which is best apprehended by the writer's countrymen. They are not of enthralling interest, and when tragical are sometimes revolting, but the exposition is easy and artistic.

GIOVANNI BATTISTA GIRALDI CINTHIO of Ferrara (1504–73) is better known by name to English readers than most of his fellow-novelists, since from him Shakespeare derived the plots of *Othello* and *Measure*

for Measure. The story on which the former drama is founded is not a bad specimen of Cinthio's usual work. His subjects are frequently tragical, sometimes shocking, but the treatment is generally powerful, the narrative direct and forcible, and he is in great measure exempt from the grossness of his contemporaries. The tales, a hundred in number, whence their title of *Ecatomithi*, are supposed to be narrated on board a ship bound for Marseilles, and conveying a party of Romans escaping from the sack of the Eternal City. They are divided like Boccaccio's into ten classes, each considered to illustrate some particular point of morals or manners. They are highly respectable performances; but by so much as they surpass Grazzini's in matter they fall below them in style, which, though not incorrect, is devoid of colour and individuality.

STRAPAROLA, already briefly alluded to, was a native of Caravaggio, and published his *Notti Piacevoli* in 1554. He is a good story-teller, although a bad stylist; but what gives him an epoch-making rank among Italian novelists is not his merit or demerit in either capacity, but his having been the first to avail himself of popular folk-lore as a groundwork for fiction. Nothing is more annoying than the almost complete neglect of popular mythology by men of culture in antiquity. Apuleius tells one inimitable tale, without saying where he got it. Synesius spends his evenings listening to the stories of the Libyan peasants, and is not at the trouble to preserve a single one. It is nevertheless clear that such tales must have been as rife in ancient times as in our own. Straparola was perhaps the first man who systematically turned them to literary account: it would have been well if he had gone much further, and proportionately

reduced his debt to Hieronymo Morlini, the chief recommendation of whose generally indecent and always ungrammatical Latin stories (Naples, 1520) is their exceeding rarity. Nearly a hundred years afterwards Straparola was completely eclipsed both as concerned the quantity and the quality of his folk-lore fictions, by the *Pentamerone* of GIOVANNI BASILE, Count of Morone, a collection whose relation to the popular mythology of other nations has occasioned endless discussion. Puss in Boots, and Cinderella, and Rapunzel, and many another favourite owe to Basile their first appearance in literary costume. In narrative he is the breathless, loquacious, exuberant Neapolitan, too much in a hurry to trouble himself about style or art, but carrying all before him by his vigour and vehemence, and betraying, as his German translator has pointed out, strong traces of the influence of Rabelais.

It will be evident from the above brief sketch of the Italian novel that in the sixteenth century the art of novel-writing was nearly identical with the art of narrative. This was fully possessed by most writers of fiction; but characterisation, ingenuity of construction and development of plot, underplot, episode, artful suspension of interest, above all the application of the novelist's art to weighty purposes, were all in the most rudimentary condition. Compared with the modern novel, the ancient story is as a simple air upon a flute to the complicated harmony of an organ. It is true that the old romances abound with hints and germs only needing development, but development was slow in coming, and even when about the beginning of the eighteenth century romance and novelette had grown into the novel, it was still long before the novel became a vehicle of ideas and a potent

factor in civilisation. The reason probably is that while the novel may employ the highest human faculties, it is at the same time the best medium for conveying ideas to the less cultivated orders of society. The extension of reading and writing to these classes has called forth a tribe of readers which had no existence in the days of the Cinque Cento, and has invested the only description of literature which powerfully appeals to them with extraordinary significance. The influence of the novel in the modern sense grows, and will continue to grow; but there is still abundant room for the short and simple story, the consistent development of a single incident or situation, compensating in art for what it lacks in variety, yet, now that human life has become so much richer and more complex than of old, at a further remove from mere anecdote than seemed necessary for its Italian prototype.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DRAMA

ALONE among the great nations of the modern world, Italy stands in the unenviable position of possessing no drama at the same time national and literary. From one point of view three classes of the drama may be distinguished. (1) The rude popular play entirely a creation of the people, such as the buffooneries of the Dionysiac festival, out of which the Athenian drama grew, or the dramatic exhibitions at fairs of itinerant actors barely distinguishable from mountebanks, like those whose puppet-plays originated *Faust*. Performances of this nature have probably existed in every nation endowed with the rudiments of culture. (2) These crude beginnings elevated by men of genius into the sphere of art, and become literary without ceasing to be popular. This is the true national drama, when the pulses of the poet and the people beat in full unison, and of which Greece, England, and Spain have given the world the most brilliant examples. (3) The artificial drama, written by men of culture for men of culture, but neglecting, or at least failing to reach the heart of the people. With the exception of the musical drama of which Metastasio affords the type, and of the comedies of Goldoni and Gozzi, all of which belonged to a more recent period than that with which we are now engaged, the whole of the Italian drama

possessing any literary pretensions belongs to this class. It is true that, as in England and elsewhere, it is accompanied by a lower order of dramatic composition which may be regarded as popular. In the early days of the Italian drama we have the *Rappresentazioni*, at a later period the *Commedia dell' Arte*, of both of which some notice must be taken. But neither is, strictly speaking, literature.

It appears at first exceedingly surprising that a nation, not only so gifted as the Italian, but so dramatically gifted, should not merely never have achieved a national drama, but should have no dramatic writer meriting to be ranked among the chief masters of the art. Lively, emotional, capable of being worked up to the most violent degrees of passion; at the same time observant, sagacious, reflective; members of a society comprising every variety of character and profession, and inheritors of a history replete with moving and tragic incidents, Italians should seem to have wanted no requisite for the creation of a flourishing stage. Prolific they were indeed: more than five thousand plays were written between 1500 and 1734. Perhaps there are not five which enjoy any considerable reputation out of Italy, or which, whatever their literary merit, can be considered characteristically Italian. The most potent of probable causes will be adduced in its place, but no single explanation, or any accumulation of partially satisfactory explanations, will entirely account for so remarkable a circumstance. One reason was probably the great development of Italian culture at an early period, compared with that of other European nations. The ablest men had become fully acquainted with Seneca and Terence, and looked upon them as painters

looked upon Raphael, or sculptors upon Phidias. They deemed them the norm of excellence, and condemned themselves to a sterile imitation, which might and often did possess high literary merit, but which was entirely estranged from popular sympathies. Men like Politian and Pontano, who really could have created a national drama if they could have trusted their own instincts, were deterred from producing anything at variance with the canons in which they themselves believed. It must be said in extenuation of their error, that the classical school, with all its defects, was vastly in advance of the rude, amorphous beginnings of the romantic drama in every country but one. One little corner of Europe alone possessed in the early sixteenth century a drama at once living, indigenous, and admirable as literature. Nothing in literary history is more surprising than the gap between Gil Vicente and his contemporaries, whether classical or romantic. Had he been born an Italian instead of a Portuguese, the history of the Italian stage might possibly have been different. It nevertheless remains to be explained why no such person arose among so gifted a people, and why throughout their entire history, with one or two marked exceptions in particular departments, Italians have never had a drama that they could justly call their own.

In its first beginnings, notwithstanding, the Italian drama was as national as any other. As with all other modern European dramas, its origin was religious. Christianity found the need of replacing the heathen shows and spectacles it had suppressed, and amused the people with representations of Scriptural subjects, or of incidents in the lives of the saints. For centuries these were never

written down, but improvised or exhibited in dumb show. Gradually the miracle-play came into being, a more advanced development, compelling learning by rote and much drilling of the performers, and therefore of necessity committed to writing. In Italy this assumed a more polished form than elsewhere, the *Rappresentazione Sacra*, rude in construction, but composed frequently in elegant, sometimes in excellent octave verse. This was a development of the fifteenth century, the earliest of which the date is known being the *Abraham and Isaac* of Feo Belcari, 1449. It became exceedingly popular in the later part of the century, especially at Florence. No less distinguished a person than Lorenzo de' Medici is enumerated among its authors. Numbers of such pieces were printed, down even to the end of the seventeenth century, and usually set off with wood-engravings, sometimes of great elegance. The materials were usually drawn from ecclesiastical legend. Constantine is represented as giving his daughter to his successful general Gallicanus, on condition of his becoming a Christian. Julian, marching to wage war with the Persians, is slain by an invisible saint. The histories of Tobit, of St. Agnes, of St. Cecilia, and numbers of similar legends, form the staple subjects. Sometimes romance is laid under contribution, as in the instance of the Emperor Octavian, but always with a religious motive. Dramatic force does not seem to have been much considered, the stately octave being better adapted for declamation than for dialogue; but the stage directions are very precise, and every effort seems to have been made to impress the spectators, so far as permitted by the rudeness of the open-air theatre, a mere scaffold with

perhaps a curtain for a background, yet often very splendidly decorated.

How near Italy came to creating a national drama is shown by the frequent representations of public events upon the stage, quite in the spirit of Shakespeare's historical plays. Two types may be discriminated—one adhering very closely to that of the *Rappresentazioni*, and composed in the vernacular; the latter following classical models, and in Latin. To the latter belongs the very tedious play of Carlo Verardi on the fall of Granada, performed before Cardinal Riario in 1492; but the very remarkable and unfortunately lost dramatic chronicle of the usurpations and downfall of the house of Borgia, acted before the Duke of Urbino on the recovery of his states in 1504, seems rather to have belonged to the former class. To this type also is allied the first Italian drama of genuine literary merit, the *Orfeo* of Politian, where the dialogue is mostly in octave stanzas, as in the *Rappresentazioni*, and the object is evidently rather to delight the spectators by a rapid succession of scenes admitting of musical accompaniment than to "purge the soul by pity and terror." Slight as this juvenile work of Politian's is, it is the work of a poet, and written with a swing and rush which recall the lyrical parts of the *Bacchæ* of Euripides. It indicates what the *Rappresentazioni* might have become but for the competition of the more classical type of drama, and seems a prelude to the thoroughly national species of composition which arose in the seventeenth and prevailed in the eighteenth century, the opera.

The Italian stage had thus made a respectable beginning with the drama a hundred years before any drama worthy of the name existed in England. The disap-

pointment of such auspicious promise is justly ascribed by Symonds, in great measure, to the want of a representative public and a centre of social life. The emulation of a number of independent cities, so favourable to the development of art, prevented the development of the national feeling essential to a national drama. The political circumstances of these communities, moreover, were inimical to the existence of a popular stage. Theatrical representations remained the amusement of courts; and when the general public was allowed to participate in them, the play itself was so enveloped in show and spectacle as to appear the least part of the entertainment. It was not possible that under such circumstances the drama could deviate far from conventional models. Tragedy continued to be composed after the pattern of Seneca, an imitation of an imitation. Comedy, though also in bondage to classical precedents, could not avoid depicting contemporary manners, and hence displays far more vitality and vigour.

Latin plays had been written by Italians from the beginning of the fifteenth century, and had included comedies, now lost, by persons of no less account than Petrarch and Æneas Sylvius. The first vernacular tragedies worthy of the name were composed for the entertainment of the court of Ferrara, and were written in the octave stanza or *terza rima*. No genius could have adapted this form to the exigencies of the stage, and a great step was taken when in 1515 Trissino, whose epic on the Gothic wars has been previously noticed, wrote his tragedy of *Sophonisba* in blank verse, retaining nothing of the lyrical element but the chorus. The piece marks an era, and as such remains celebrated, notwithstanding its total want of poetry and passion. It would have

been a good outline for an abler hand to have clothed with substance. Trissino had abundance of successors and imitators, most of whom had more poetical endowment, but few more genuine vocation, and all of whom are devoid of any impulse except the ambition of literary distinction. This could only be reached by the prescribed path; and no vestige of originality appears in any of them except Sperone Speroni's innovation, not laudable in a tragedy, although a fruitful suggestion for the pastoral drama, of mingling lyrical metres with the regulation blank verse. The subject of his play, the incest of Macareus and Canace, infinitely overtaxed his elegant talent. Of the other tragedies of the time, the best known are the *Rosmunda* of Rucellai, the *Mariamne* of Lodovico Dolce, and the *Orbecche* of Cinthio the novelist, whose *Epitia* contains the rude germ of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*.[1] At a later date tragedy was attempted by a true poet of great genius, who would assuredly have produced something memorable under favourable circumstances. But the composition of Tasso's *Torrismondo*, commenced in his youth, was long interrupted, and the play was completed in 1586 under the depressing circumstances of his Mantuan exile. It thus wants energy; and, as Carducci remarks, Tasso is too much of an eclectic, striving by a combination of the advantages of all styles to supply the one indispensable gift of poetical inspiration, which misfortune had all but extinguished.

[1] The novel by Cinthio himself on which this play is founded was dramatised by Whetstone; but that Shakespeare had seen Cinthio's dramatic version also may be inferred from a minute circumstance. Cinthio's play, not his novel or Whetstone's adaptation of it, has a character named Angela, whose name disappears from *Measure for Measure*, but who bequeaths Angelo as that of her brother, whom Cinthio calls Juristi, and Whetstone Andrugio.

The first Italian comedies, like the tragedies, were written in rhyme. One early example is entitled to notice, both on account of the subject and as the work of an excellent poet, the *Timone* of Boiardo. It is little more than a translation of Lucian's Dialogue, yet was, we feel confident, the channel through which Shakespeare gained the acquaintance with that work revealed in his *Timon of Athens*. The history of Italian comedy as a recognised form of art should, however, be dated from the *Calandra* of Cardinal Bibbiena, first performed about 1508. It hardly attempts delineation of character, but, as Symonds remarks, "achieved immediate success by reproducing both the humour of Boccaccio and the invention of Plautus in the wittiest vernacular." The plot is taken from the *Menæchmi* of Plautus, the source of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors;* but Bibbiena's idea of making the indistinguishable twins brother and sister enhances the comic effect at the expense of morality, little considered by cardinals in those days.

The great success of Bibbiena's comedy was calculated to encourage rivalry, and it chanced that two of the first men in Italy of the day possessed the dramatic instinct, combined with a decided gift for satire. In the year following the exhibition of the *Calandra* (1509), Ariosto gave the *Cassaria*, a comedy of intrigue on the Plautine model. The same description is applicable to his other comedies, the *Suppositi*, the *Lena*, the *Negromante*, and the *Scolastica*. In all except the *Negromante* the action turns upon the stratagems of a knavish servant to obtain for his master the money indispensable for the gratification of his amorous desires. This style of comedy requires a well-contrived plot, and the maintenance of the interest throughout by a series of ingenious surprises and un-

foreseen incidents. In these Ariosto fully attains his object. Writing for the amusement of a court, he does not care to stray from the conventions which he knows will satisfy, and his pieces afford no measure of the success he might have attained if he had appealed to the public and essayed to depict Italian society as it existed. One of the characters is exceedingly lifelike, the accommodating Dominican in the *Scolastica*, who, armed with all imaginable faculties from the Pope, is ready to commute the fulfilment of an inconvenient vow into the performance of some good work profitable to his order. This play was left unfinished, but was written before the *Lena* and the *Negromante*, which probably appeared about 1528.

The other Italian comic writer of genius was one of more powerful intellect and more serious character than Ariosto, if less richly endowed as a poet. Released from prison after the overthrow of his party and the loss of his political position in 1512, Machiavelli found solace in the composition of the *Mandragola* (*Mandrake*), a piece acted before the Pope in that day, and which could hardly be represented anywhere in this. Its cynicism is worse than its immorality, the plot consisting in the stratagem by which an innocent young wife is persuaded to admit a lover; all the personages, including the husband, who is nevertheless himself deceived in a material point, co-operating for so laudable an end. Disagreeable as the situation is, it is probably founded upon fact; and at all events the play is no pale copy of Plautus or Terence, but full of consistent and strongly individualised characters, and scenes of the most drastically comic effect. The portrait of the rascally father confessor is particularly vigorous, and proves of itself

how ripe the times were for Luther. A dozen more plays of equal merit would have raised the Italian stage very high. But no successor to Machiavelli appeared; and his other play, the *Clizia*, is deficient in originality, being little more than a paraphrase of the *Casina* of Plautus.

Many comedies of considerable merit succeeded Machiavelli's, among which may be particularly mentioned those of Firenzuola, who followed Roman precedents, and of Cecchi, and Gelli, and Grazzini, who to a considerable extent disengaged themselves from tradition. Angelo Beolco, called *Il Ruzzante*, struck upon a new vein in the delineation of rustic life, involving the employment of dialect; and, near the end of the century, the life of the people was represented with extreme vividness by Buonarotti, nephew of Michael Angelo, in his *Fiera* and *Tancia*. One other comic dramatist takes an important place, the repulsive and decried Aretino. His claim to permanent significance is grounded, not on the scanty literary merits of his works, but on the unique characteristic thus expressed by Symonds, "They depict the great world from the standpoint of the servants' hall." They are the work of a low-minded man, who could see nothing but the baser traits of the society around him, but saw these clearly, and also saw no reason why he should not blazon what he saw. Hence his usefulness is in the ratio of his offensiveness.

It is significant of the difference between the Italian mind and the Spanish, and of the extent to which the former had emancipated itself from mediævalism, that the *Rappresentazione*, touching so nearly on the confines of the Spanish *Auto*, never developed into that or any allied variety of the drama. The abstractions of the vices

and virtues, so natural to the Spaniard and the man of the Middle Age in general, were uncongenial to the Italian, whose *Rappresentazioni* were always peopled by definite, tangible persons, even if of the spiritual order. The *Adamo* of Andreini, early in the seventeenth century, from which Milton undoubtedly derived his first idea of treating the Fall in a miracle play, might have led to a development in this direction, but remained an isolated eccentricity. The true national development lay in quite another path, the pastoral drama. Something like this might be found in Gil Vicente, but we may be certain that his works were totally unknown in Italy, and that the pastoral play grew out of such romances as the Arcadia, such eclogues as those of Baptista Mantuanus, and the court masques in which the principal parts were taken by shepherds and shepherdesses. Politian's *Orfeo* is not very far from being such a piece, although it is a good deal more. A pastoral masque was composed as early as 1506 by Castiglione for the amusement of the court of Urbino. Others followed from time to time, and developed into a real pastoral drama by Beccari in 1554; but the literary pretensions of this class of composition continued to be very slender until it was virtually created by Tasso's *Aminta* in 1573. Few novel experiments in literature have enjoyed a more immediate or more permanent success. Numerous as were the *Aminta's* imitators, its primacy has never but once been seriously challenged, and its nature and simplicity have in general been justly preferred to the more elaborate artifice of the *Pastor Fido*. It is indeed deficient in the rich poetry of its English rival, the *Faithful Shepherdess*, "as inferior, poetically speaking," says Leigh Hunt, "as a lawn with a few trees on it is to the depths of a forest."

But Leigh Hunt confesses its superiority in "true dramatic skill, and flesh and blood interest"; it is indeed as far as anything can be from the insipidity usually associated with pastoral compositions. It has, moreover, more of the genuine yearning for the golden age, the spirit which inspires Keats's *Endymion*, than is found in the fanciful dramas of Fletcher, or Milton, or Ben Jonson. "The central motive of *Aminta* and the *Pastor Fido*," says Symonds, "is the contrast between the actual world of ambition, treachery, and sordid strife, and the ideal world of pleasure, loyalty, and tranquil ease."

Although the pastoral drama is a legitimate as well as a beautiful kind of composition, it is not capable of very great extension or variety. Tasso's successors might conceivably surpass him as poets, but could only repeat him as dramatists. His only serious competitor is his contemporary GIOVANNI BATTISTA GUARINI, the author of the *Pastor Fido* (1537–1612).

Guarini, the descendant of a Veronese family already distinguished in letters, was, like Tasso, attached to the court of the Duke of Ferrara; but, unlike Tasso, was a man of the world, and was employed in several important missions, especially one to solicit the crown of Poland for his master, where he nearly died of a Polish inn. Like most of the Duke's literary protégés, he became estranged from him, and spent the later part of his life in roaming from court to court in quest of employment, and litigating with his children and the world at large. His disposition was quarrelsome; literary disputes had long severed him from Tasso; it is to his honour that when the latter was unable to watch over his own works, he took care of and published his lyrical poems. The

most brilliant episode of Guarini's life was the publication of his *Pastor Fido* in 1590; but not the least troublesome was the literary controversy in which it involved him. These disputes, born rather of the idleness than of the conscientiousness of the Italian literati, are now forgotten, and the *Pastor Fido*, a direct challenge to the *Aminta*, is allowed an honourable though a second place. Its relation to its predecessor may be compared to that of the Corinthian order to the Ionic. Guarini has sought to compensate for the lack of natural, spontaneous inspiration by superior artifice of plot: his characters are more numerous, and his action more intricate and ingenious. This would not have availed him much if he had not been a poet, but this he certainly was, though with less of the *nascitur* and more of the *fit* than usual. Tasso was conscious of a truer inspiration, and conveys his claim to the virtual invention of a new mode in poetry in the verses which he has placed in the mouth of Love appearing in the disguise of a shepherd, thus rendered by Leigh Hunt:

> "*After new fashion shall these woods to-day*
> *Hear love discoursed; and it shall well be seen*
> *That my divinity is present here*
> *In its own person, not its ministers.*
> *I will inbreathe high fancies in rude hearts;*
> *I will refine, and render dulcet sweet,*
> *Their tongues; because, wherever I may be,*
> *Whether with rustic or heroic men,*
> *There am I Love; and inequality,*
> *As it may please me, I do equalise;*
> *And 'tis my crowning glory and great miracle*
> *To make the rustic pipe as eloquent*
> *Even as the subtlest harp.*"

Guarini frequently repeated Tasso's ideas, striving to

enhance their effect by careful elaboration. The poetry of one or both has passed into Calderon's *Magico Prodigioso*, and originated the scene of the temptation of Justina, an ornament of English literature in the incomparable version of Shelley.

CHAPTER XVIII

TASSO

THE year 1564 is memorable in the intellectual history of the world. It marks the beginning of the long ascent of the North, and of the slow depression of the South. In it Shakespeare was born; in it Michael Angelo died; in it the decrees of the Council of Trent were promulgated by one of the most liberal and enlightened of the Popes, even as the Society of Jesus had been established twenty-four years before by another entitled to the same commendation. Neither Paul nor Pius was free to gratify his personal inclinations at the expense of the institution over which he presided; and in fact the Society and the Council were less important in themselves than as indicative of the new spirit which was to prevail in Roman Catholic countries, destructive, so far as its influence extended, of science, and deadly to learning, literature, and art. The time was at hand when the policy of great states was to be controlled by confessors; when the clergy, under the influence of a training in special seminaries, were to be converted from an order into a caste; when the entire influence of State and Church was to be devoted to the repression of free thought, with the inevitable result of intellectual degeneracy, and mortifying inferiority to the nations which,

with whatever limitations, acknowledged the principle of freedom.

From this period Italian literature, though still interesting in itself, becomes comparatively unimportant in its relation to general civilisation; it drops from the first place into the third, and every year widens the interval between the retrogressive and the progressive peoples. The results of eighty years of oppression are thus stated by an illustrious visitor on the authority of the Italians themselves: "I have sate among their learned men," says Milton, "and been counted happy to be born in such a place of philosophic freedom as they supposed England was, while they themselves did nothing but bemoan the servile condition into which learning among them was brought, that this was it which had damped the glory of Italian wits; that nothing had been written there now these many years but flattery and fustian." These, it will be observed, are not Milton's own words, but report the views of the cultivated Italians with whom he associated, and who, enslaved but not subdued, still nurtured hopes which our times have seen fulfilled. Could the foreigner have been excluded, could men like these have been left to settle by themselves with priest and prince, it is probable that the anti-Renaissance reaction and the counter-Reformation would never have come to pass. Yet Italy cannot be wholly excused; the foreigner had brought the mischief, but who had brought the foreigner?

This age of decadence is nevertheless represented to posterity by one of the greatest poets of Italy; nor can his misfortunes be specially charged upon it. The sad story of TORQUATO TASSO has ever excited and ever must excite the deepest compassion; but it is not now believed

that any fellow-mortal was responsible for his sorrows, or that they were materially aggravated by ill-usage from any quarter. The simple fact is that during the later part of his life Tasso was frequently either insane or on the borderland between sanity and insanity, and that, given his peculiar mental constitution, his double portion of the morbid irritability and sensitiveness commonly incidental to the poetical temperament, the same affliction must have befallen him under any circumstances or in any age of the world. It is indeed possible that his brain was in some measure clouded and warped by the unnatural discipline of the Jesuits into whose hands he fell in his boyhood, and that this determined the nature of some of the symptoms of mental alienation which he afterwards manifested. It was, moreover, his great misfortune that his age should have afforded no other sphere for a delicate and candid mind than a court honeycombed with intrigue and jealousy. Yet the fate of so morbidly sensitive a spirit could hardly have been materially different; it is only wonderful that he should have regained so much of his intellect and died master of himself. Courtly society and religious excitement between them admirably trained his magnificent genius to write the *Jerusalem Delivered*, in its relation to general culture the epic of the Roman Catholic revival, but, from the large-hearted humanity of the author, happily much more.

The circumstances of Tasso's youth were such as to intensify the innate melancholy of his disposition. His father Bernardo, whom we have met with as a poet and a high-minded cavalier, ruined himself and his family within a few years after Torquato's birth at Sorrento (1544) by the noble imprudence of the advice which he

gave to his Neapolitan patron, and, though afterwards the servant of princes, died in poverty. When twelve years old Tasso lost his mother, poisoned, as was thought, by her relatives, to rob her husband of her portion. We have spoken of the Jesuitry which marred his early education; afterwards, however, he was brought up in a much saner manner. At Urbino, where his father found a temporary refuge, afterwards in busy Venice and at Padua, where he ineffectually studied law, he had become a master of classics, mathematics, and philosophy, and had not only read but annotated Dante. By the time (1565) when he became attached to the court of Ferrara, he had published his *Rinaldo*, in form an imitation of Ariosto, but indicative of a new spirit; and had less fortunately signalised the termination of a two years' residence at Bologna by a scrape in which he had involved himself by reciting a pasquinade upon the university, which not unnaturally caused him to be accused of having written it. This adventure at least evinced serious deficiency in tact—an endowment more essential than genius in the situation where he now found himself.

Tasso's immediate obligations at the court of Ferrara were to Luigi, Cardinal d'Este, brother of the Duke, who seems to have expected nothing from him but duteous attendance, and the completion of the great poem of which the *Rinaldo* had given promise, and whose theme was still unfixed. Nothing appears to the Cardinal's disadvantage; nor is any especial reproach addressed to his high-spirited brother the Duke, except the heavy taxation he imposed to maintain a magnificence disproportioned to his revenue. The two great ladies of the court, the Duke's sisters, were decidedly sympathetic,

and there seems no reason to attribute malevolence to his fellow-courtiers. The situation of this child of genius at a court was indeed a false one, and could have no fortunate issue; yet the innate germ of insanity would almost certainly have developed itself, whatever the external circumstances of his lot. For five or six years all went well. Tasso chose the subject of his poem, laboured diligently at it, attracted universal admiration by the brilliancy and fluency of his occasional compositions, disputed successfully with the élite of Ferrara on the subject of Love, and in 1571 accompanied the Cardinal on a mission to France. The French court had not yet resolved upon the St. Bartholomew, and its coquettings with the Huguenots scandalised the devout poet. He composed two discourses upon France and its affairs, which, although in some respects fanciful, display much penetration. On his return he quitted the Cardinal's service for no very apparent reason, and shortly afterwards entered the Duke's. This would bring him into more intimate relations with the Duke's sisters. One of these, Lucrezia, soon contracted, avowedly for reasons of state, a marriage with the Duke of Urbino; but Leonora, weak in health and devoted to good works, remained single. With her the romance of Tasso's life is associated; and although the belief that a presumptuous attachment occasioned his imprisonment is undoubtedly groundless, the attachment itself is the evident inspiration of much of his lyrical poetry:

"*Lady, though cruel destiny deny*
To follow you, and eager feet enchains,
Ever the heart upon your vestige strains,
And save your tresses knows not any tie.

And as the birdling doth attendant fly,
Lured by the hand that tempting food detains,
Moved by like cause it follows you and plains,
Pining for consolation from your eye.
Gently within your hand the roamer take
Into your breast, and let it nestle there,
Soothed to great blissfulness in narrow span,
Until at length its soul in song awake,
And its dear woe and your great worth declare
From Adria's shore to shores Etrurian."

Such verses are too deeply felt for mere compliment, and, if sincere, could only be addressed to some one much above himself in station. In another sonnet a consciousness of presumption is clearly indicated:

"*Of Icarus and Phaethon hast read?*
Thou'lt know how one was in these waters whirled,
When he with orient light would wake the world,
And with sun's fire endiadem his head;
That other in the sea, when, rashly spread,
His waxen wings he voyaging unfurled;
So headlong evermore the man be hurled
Who ways divine with mortal foot would tread.
But who shall quake in difficult emprise
If Gods attend him? What is not allowed
To Love, who knits in one all things divine?
Forsaking heavenly spheres that sing and shine,
By him Diana to a shepherd bowed,
And Ida's youth was rapt unto the skies."

Neither Tasso nor Leonora, however, was of an amorous temperament; and there is no reason to suppose that he experienced any great difficulty in keeping his passion within Platonic bounds. The hidden flame may well have wrought him to the production of his unsurpassed *Aminta* in 1572–73. But in 1574 a severe illness marks an era in his life; he is never again quite the same man.

In 1575 we encounter the first decided symptoms of an unsettled mind in querulousness and morbid suspicion, augmented, we may well believe, by the vexations attendant upon the revision of his now completed epic. He thought, and with justice, that he had written a truly religious poem, and he now found the ecclesiastical reaction demanding by the mouth of Silvio Antoniano, a type of the Roman Catholic Puritan of that ungenial day, that it should be adapted to the reading of monks and nuns. Solerti, his chief modern biographer, seems inclined to consider "his two years' warfare with bigotry and pedantry" the principal cause of his insanity; Carducci rather accuses his Jesuit education. Both were actual causes, more potent and malignant than his sentimental attachment to Leonora; but in truth the germ of insanity had always been latent in his brain, and the special occasion of its manifestation was comparatively immaterial.

Happily, as Settembrini justly distinguishes, it was not obscuration or decay, but exalted tension of the mind, and left the power of thinking and writing almost unimpaired, except under the influence of violent paroxysm. The disorder assumed the special form of morbid suspicion, a constant dread of inimical machinations, and self-accusation of imaginary heresies. He fled from Ferrara only to return; and at length (July 1579) a frenzied attack upon a retainer of the court necessitated his confinement as a lunatic. He would not have been subjected to the indignity of chains in our day, but the psychiatry of that age knew no better, and the best proof that its methods were not utterly perverse is the speedy restoration of his reason in a much greater measure than could have been hoped. At first he was

unquestionably maniacal; but his state gradually became one of apparent sanity infested by delusions, to which many of the painful particulars alleged in his letters are to be ascribed. One prevailing hallucination was the frequent visitation of a familiar spirit, with whom he held long dialogues. His treatment improved with his mental condition; though sometimes, by the inattention of his custodians, as we must think, short of necessary food, he had comfortable apartments, was allowed to carry on an extensive and apparently uncontrolled correspondence, and produced enough excellent work, chiefly prose dialogues, to prove at least the enjoyment of numerous lucid intervals. At length, in July 1586, he was permitted to retire to Mantua. Alphonso appears to have behaved becomingly to the poet, considered merely as an unhappy vassal: it is no special reproach to him to have been neither an Alexander the Great nor a Wolfe to rightly appraise the comparative worth of the *Jerusalem Delivered* and the ducal crown of Ferrara.

The remainder of Tasso's life was spent in restless wanderings to and fro between courts and cities, like the tossings of a sick man who vainly seeks ease by shifting his position upon his couch. He could not live without a patron, and no patron long contented him. It would be tedious to tell how often he forsook and resought Mantua, Florence, Rome, Naples; he even made overtures of reconciliation to Ferrara. It was not his fault, but sheer mental infirmity, by which, however, his reason, though frequently obscured or misled, was never again overthrown. At Naples his friend Manso heard a profound argument between him and his familiar spirit; both voices were his own, but of this Tasso was unconscious. He had completed and published his

tragedy, *Torrismondo*, at Mantua in 1586; at Naples the exhortations of Manso's mother led him to compose his blank-verse poem on the Week of Creation (*Il Mondo Creato*), chiefly remarkable for its evident influence on the style and versification of Milton. The latter books, written in sickness, evince some languor, but no symptoms of disordered faculties appear, although the servility of the pseudo-religious sentiment painfully evinces how much ecclesiastical influences had enslaved him, and how he had fallen away from the free spirit of the Renaissance.

Another work of Tasso's decline, the reconstruction of the *Jerusalem Delivered* under the title of the *Conquest of Jerusalem*, although an error of judgment, yet rather indicates undue sensitiveness to criticism than insanity. Imperfect as the first editions had been, the *Jerusalem* had been received with enthusiasm, but had also excited much pedantic and some bigoted censure. The general result had been to convince Tasso that his poem was too romantic and not sufficiently epical; which, abstractedly considered, was true, but simply arose from the fact that his genius was rather romantic than epic. In endeavouring to bring his poem nearer Homer he led it away from Nature, and the beauties which he introduced bore no proportion to those which he retrenched. The new recension fell entirely flat, and is now almost unknown; although had the *Jerusalem Delivered* never been published, the *Conquest* would undoubtedly have gained Tasso a considerable name. It was dedicated to a new patron, Cardinal Cinthio Aldobrandini, nephew of Pope Clement VIII., and all allusions to the house of Este, for whose heritage the Pope, "hushed in grim repose," was patiently waiting, were

carefully expunged. Cinthio proved a kind and considerate patron; and Clement, who was endowed with a regal instinct for doing the right thing at the right time, was on the point of honouring Tasso with a public coronation after the example of Petrarch, when on April 25, 1595, death removed him from earthly honours and indignities in the convent of San Onofrio, where he had for some time found an asylum, and where the crown which should have arrayed his temples was placed upon his bier.

Apart from the failings without which he would hardly have been a poet, and the infirmities for which it would be unjust to make him responsible, Tasso's deportment throughout life was that of an amiable, high-minded, and accomplished gentleman. Two defects alone produce a painful impression—the entire lack of any sense of humour, and the apparent indifference to all public interests outside of court and ecclesiastical life. The former of these was congenital, irremediable, and bitterly expiated by the undignified predicaments in which it involved him; the latter would not have existed if he had lived in a better age. He did, indeed, like Spenser and Tennyson, attribute a didactic and allegorical purpose to his poem which may have been patent to his own mind, but with which no reader, if not a commentator also, ever concerned himself. Yet the significance of the *Jerusalem Delivered* does not solely consist in the beauty of the language and the exquisiteness of the characters: although an artificial, it is in some sense a national epic. Thanks mainly to the pressure of foreign tyrants, Protestantism and the Renaissance both had for the time been crushed in Italy, and the Italian poet who would be national must write in the spirit of the reaction. Catholicism was put-

ting forth its utmost strength to drive back the Ottoman and the heretic; and although, when Tasso began his *Jerusalem*, he could have foreseen neither Lepanto nor the St. Bartholomew, it is a remarkable instance of the harmony which pervades all human affairs, that both should have happened ere he had completed it. Had either been the subject of his poem, the result would have been utter failure; but the great theme of the Crusades exhibits the dominant thought of his own day exalted to a commanding elevation, set at an awful distance, and purged of all contemporary littleness; transfigured in the radiance of poetry and history. A nobler subject for epic song could not well be found, save for the defect which it shares with almost all epics which have been created by study and reflection, and have not, like the *Iliad*, grown spontaneously out of the heart and mind of a great people. The principal action is insufficient for the poem, and needs to be eked out and adorned by copious episodes. The *Æneid* would present a poor figure without the burning of Troy, the death of Dido, and Æneas's descent to the shades; the *Jerusalem* is still more indebted to Clorinda and Armida, and the embellishment is still more loosely connected with the poem's ostensible purpose. Tasso's genius was in many respects truly epical; yet, the nearer he approaches lyric or pastoral, the more thoroughly he seems at home. That his Saracens should be more interesting than his Christians, and his Christians most interesting when least Christian, was perhaps inevitable. It is a proof of the essential excellence of human nature that, unless in very extreme cases, its sympathies are always most readily enlisted by the weaker side. Homer himself

could not avoid making Hector more attractive than Achilles. Another defect lay less in the nature of things than in the spirit of the age, the occasional anticipation of the false taste of the seventeenth century. Italy was weary of the elegant exteriors and empty interiors of the compositions of Bembo and Molza. A Wordsworth, arising to proclaim a return to nature, might have endowed her with a new age of great literature, but the circumstances of the time absolutely forbade any such apparition, and the craving for vitality and vigour had to be appeased by a show of intellectual dexterity and mere exaggeration. Tasso betrays just enough of the premonitory symptoms of this literary plague to call down the wrath of Boileau, whose outrageous denunciation has been remembered where measured reproof would have been forgotten.

When all has been said that can be said, the *Jerusalem Delivered* remains a very great poem, the greatest of all the artificial epics after the *Æneid* and *Paradise Lost* (for Ariosto's poem, so frequently paralleled with it, is not an epic at all). That Tasso should approach Virgil more nearly than any other poet is perhaps unfortunate for him; the *Jerusalem* and the *Æneid* constantly admit of comparison, and wherever comparison is possible the former is a little behind. To compare Tasso with Milton seems almost profanation; and indeed, if, as so often assumed, the greatness of an epic poet is to be measured by his sublimity, the *Jerusalem* is entirely out of the field. Milton is the sublimest of non-dramatic poets after Homer: Tasso, always dignified and sometimes grand, rarely attains sublimity, and falls particularly short of it in the description of the infernal council, where comparison

with Milton is most obvious. Yet he has advantages which it would be unjust to deny. He has not, like Milton, proposed to himself an unattainable object: he has not to justify the ways of God to man, but to recount the conquest of Jerusalem. He is more uniform in merit: it cannot be said of his poem that the catastrophe takes place in the middle, and that the interest steadily declines thenceforth.

What, however, especially distinguishes Tasso, not only from Milton, but from modern epic poets in general, is the number and excellence of his characters, mostly of his own creation. Rinaldo, Tancred, Argante, Emireno, Solimano, Clorinda, Armida, Erminia, form a gallery of portraits whose picturesqueness and variety redeem Tasso's inferiority in other respects; while at the same time, even were his canvas less brilliantly occupied, it could not be said that his poem wanted either the unity, the interest, the dignity, the just proportion, the poetical spirit, the elevated diction, or the harmonious versification essential to a great epic. The great defect of the poem, regarded as an epic, is that Tasso's bent, like Virgil's, was rather towards the pathetic, the picturesque, and the romantic, than towards the sublime and majestic. He can command dignity and grandeur on occasion; but, even as the *Æneid* opens most readily at Dido, Marcellus, or Euryalus, so the *Jerusalem* attracts most by its female characters, Erminia, Clorinda, and Armida. Armida is a charming personage, an improvement upon the Alcina of Ariosto, but a passage like the following, rendered by Miss Ellen Clerke, would be more appropriately placed in an *Orlando* or an *Odyssey* than in an epic on so high and grave a

theme as the redemption of the holy city from the unbeliever:

"*Arrived on shore, he in review doth pass*
The spot with eager glance, but nought descries,
Save caves and water-flowers, and trees and grass,
So deems himself befooled; but in such wise
The place doth tempt—such charms did nature mass
Together there—that on the sward he lies,
His forehead from its heavy armour eases,
And bares it to the sweet and soothing breezes.

Then of a gurgling murmur he was 'ware
Within the stream, and thither turned his eyes,
And saw a ripple in 'mid current there
Whirl round about itself in eddying guise,
And thence emerge a glint of golden hair,
And thence a maiden's lovely face uprise;
Her voice the ear enthralled, her face the vision,
And heaven hung tranced upon her notes Elysian.

And now the false one's song of treacherous wile
O'erpowers the youth with slumberous heaviness,
And by degrees that serpent base and vile
Subdues his senses with o'ermastering stress,
Nor death's still mimicry, wrought by her guile,
Could thunders rouse from; other sounds far less.
Then the foul sorceress from her ambush showing,
Stands over him, with hate and fury glowing.

But as she gazing scans the gentle sighs,
The stir of whose soft breathing she can mark,
The smile that lurked around the beauteous eyes,
Now closed (what then their living glances dark?),
She pauses thrilled, then droops in tender guise,
Beside him—quenched her hatred's every spark,
As rapt above that radiant brow inclining,
She seems Narcissus o'er the fountain pining.

The dew of heat there starting, she ne'er tires
With tender fingers in her veil to dry;
While his cheek softly fanning, she desires
The heat to temper of the summer sky;

Thus (who could have believed it?) smouldering fires
Of hidden orbs dissolved the frost, whereby
That adamantine heart its core did cover,
And the harsh foe becomes the tender lover.

Pale privet, roses red, and lilies white,
Perennial blooming on that lovely shore,
Blent with strange art, she wove in fetters light
Yet close of clasp, and flung them softly o'er
His neck and arms and feet; thus helpless quite
She bound and held him fast, and sleeping bore
Unto the prison of her car aerial,
And carried in swift flight through realms ethereal."

Few of the great artificial epics of the world, those which have not been moulded out of songs and legends welling up spontaneously from the heart of the people, can sustain very strict criticism of their poetical economy, and the *Jerusalem Delivered* perhaps less than any other. The subject of the Crusades, indeed, is a very great one, too vast even to be embraced in a single poem; and the capture of Jerusalem, though of all its incidents incomparably the most fit for poetical treatment, is not of itself sufficiently extensive for an epic poem. It must consequently be enriched by episodes, which in Tasso's hands have the double fault of jarring with the spirit of the main action, and of obscuring its due predominance by their superior attractiveness. It might perhaps have been otherwise if Tasso had been cast in the mould of Milton or had lived in an austerer age. Italian poetry, however, was so saturated by the influence of Petrarch and Ariosto that any embellishments of the chief action must of necessity partake of the character of love and romance. The former class, however charming in themselves, inevitably depressed the character of an epic so largely depending upon them as the

Jerusalem, below that proper to an heroic poem. The romance and sorcery, though recommended to Tasso as introducing the supernatural, then considered indispensable to epic poetry, provoke criticism by their inconsistency. If the enchanters Ismeno and Armida could do so much, they might have done a great deal more. Ismeno has all the infernal hosts at his command, and makes hardly any use of them. Pluto is a most lazy and incompetent devil. Armida might easily have made her magic island impregnable. The whole contrivance of the enchanted wood, though full of descriptive beauties, is weak as poetical machinery; it could have offered no real obstacle to the Christians. And it is almost comical to observe that amid all the confusion the venerable Peter the Hermit knows perfectly well what is to happen, can remedy every misfortune when he chooses, and could have prevented it but for the convenience of the poet, more inexorable than the fiat of the Fates.

The merit of the *Jerusalem*, then, consists mainly in details whose beauty requires no exposition. Mention has already been made of the merit of the character-painting, which greatly surpasses Ariosto's. The latter's personages are in comparison puppets; Tasso's are living men and women. The passion of love in the three principal female characters is exquisitely painted, and admirably discriminated in accordance with the disposition of each. Erminia, in particular, calls up the sweetest image conceivable of womanly tenderness and devotion. Rinaldo is less interesting than he should have been; but Tancred is the mirror of chivalry; and the difficulty of delineating a perfect hero without provoking scepticism or disgust is overcome as nearly as possible in the character of Goffredo. The veteran Raimondo's insistence upon the

post of honour and danger; the indomitable spirit of Solimano; the circumspect valour of Emireno, devoid of illusion, and with no aim but the fulfilment of duty—are noble traits, and the more so as the poet found them in himself. The very last incident in the poem, Goffredo's interference to save his gallant enemy Altamoro, is one that could have occurred to no one less noble and courteous than the author of the *Jerusalem*. It is very different from Bradamante's behaviour to Atlante in the *Orlando Furioso*.

Another honourable characteristic is Tasso's love of science and discovery, revealed by many passages in his minor poems and his dialogues, and in the *Jerusalem* by the noble prophecy of the Columbus to be. His sonnet to Stigliani, hereafter to be quoted, appears to hint that with better health and fortune he would himself have taken the exploits of Columbus as the subject of another epic; and he is said to have remarked that the only contemporary poet against whom he felt any hesitation in measuring himself was Camoens, the singer of the discoveries of the Portuguese. This theme, often essayed, and never with success, would have favoured Tasso's genius in so far as it exempted him from describing single combats and pitched battles. His battle-pieces are not ineffective, but he is evidently more at home among the sorceries of Armida's enchanted garden:

"'*Ah mark!*' *he sang*, '*the rose but now revealed,*
Fresh from its veiling sheath of virgin green,
Unfolded yet but half, half yet concealed,
More fair to see, the less it may be seen.
Now view its bare and flaunting pride unsealed;
All faded now, as though it ne'er had been
The beauteous growth, that while it bloomed retired,
A thousand maids, a thousand youths desired.

'Thus passeth in the passing of a day
Life's flower, with green and roseate tints imbued:
Think not, since Spring leads back the laughing May,
The mortal bloom shall likewise be renewed.
Cull we the rose in morning's prime, ere grey
Dims the fair vault, and cloud and gloom intrude.
Cull we Love's roses in the hour approved,
When whoso loves may hope to be beloved.'

He ceased, and with one voice the feathered choir,
Applauding as it seemed, resume their strain;
Again the billing, amorous doves suspire,
And every creature turns to love again;[1]
Chaste laurel burns, the thrilling sap mounts higher
In rugged oaks, light foliage flutters fain;
And earth and ocean seem to throb and move
With softest sense and sweetest sighs of Love."

The alterations introduced by Tasso when he remodelled his epic amount to an admission of the justice of the charges brought against him, of having deviated too much into picturesque episodes, and been, in short, too lyrical. It might therefore have been expected that he would have taken a supreme place in lyrical poetry, and the anticipation would have been confirmed by the triumph of his *Aminta*. It is not entirely justified by his other lyrical performances; few of his numerous canzoni and multitudinous sonnets being absolutely in the front rank. The cause is probably want of concentration; he was always ready with a sonnet at call, and composed far too many upon petty and trivial occasions. His best lyrics, nevertheless, have a property which no other Italian poetry possesses in like measure—a certain majestic vehemence, like that of a mighty river, or what Shakespeare describes as "the proud full sail of his

[1] "*Ogni animal di amar si riconsiglia.*" A line taken bodily out of Petrarch.

great verse." It has even been argued, mainly on the strength of "that affable familiar ghost," that Tasso was the rival of whom Shakespeare complains; however this may be, no description could better express the peculiarity of his lyrical style. The manner, unfortunately, is often far in advance of the matter. There is no more splendid example, for instance, than his "Coronal"[1] of sonnets, where a sonority and impetuosity that might have celebrated the battle of Lepanto are squandered upon the house of Este. The same qualities, however, are always present when his feelings are deeply moved, as when he accompanies in thought his lady to the verge of the sea:

"*Silver and diamond and gem and gold—*
Wealth from wrecks anciently by tempests rent—
And coral of its own with pearl besprent,
The sea in homage at thy feet uprolled;—
For whom might Jupiter again be bold
In shape of bull to plough the element—
And, foaming at thy feet in billows spent,
With liquid tongue its murmuring story told:
O Nymph, O Goddess, not from caverned bower
Of ocean sprung, but heaven, who canst enchain
My seething turbulence, not now the power
Of gentle moon conducts the obedient main,
But thine; fear nothing; I but swell to shower
My gifts, and turn me to my deeps again."

[1] A series of twelve sonnets on the same subject, interlinked by each successive piece beginning with the last line of the preceding.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PROSE OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

THE seventeenth century is for Italy a period of stagnation, relieved only by the endeavour to conceal decay by fantastic extravagance, by a fortunate reaction near its termination, and by some genuine progress in isolated directions, which would have been fruitful of important results in a better age. The false taste which disfigured the epoch was not peculiar to Italy; but while in other countries it appears a symptom of exuberant life, a disorder incident to infancy, in Italy it dominates literature, some departments of practical knowledge and study excepted. What elsewhere was boisterous youth, was in Italy premature old age. No other cause for this decadence can be assigned than the withering of national life under the blight of civil and ecclesiastical tyranny. The reform of the Church, the purification of morals, excellent things in themselves, had been bought from the counter-Reformation at far too high a price.

We have indicated 1564 as the year in which the North of Europe begins to gain steadily at the expense of the South. The date especially fatal to Italy may perhaps be carried five years back, to 1559, when the long contest between France and Spain for supremacy in the Peninsula was decided in favour of the latter by the treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis. Up to this

time the Italians had been in some measure able to play their oppressors off against each other; and such from Alexander the Sixth's time had been the policy of the Popes, who all wished the expulsion of the barbarians, in so far as compatible with their own family interests. The accommodation between the foreign Herod and the foreign Pilate put an end to this system. The hope of the independence of Italy was definitively resigned, the minor princes submitted to be Spanish vassals, and the Popes indemnified themselves by enlisting the monarchs in support of their spiritual authority. Jesuits, seminary priests, and inquisitors darkened the land, and the ever-augmenting pressure culminated at last in the rules for censorship promulgated by Clement VIII. in 1595, which effectually stifled freedom of thought, and stopped the dissemination of knowledge, except by leave of those whose interest it was to prevent it. Not merely were heretical or licentious writings interdicted, but criticism on rulers and ecclesiastics, and praises of the freedom and virtue of antiquity.

Such satires as those in which, in the days of the Renaissance, Alamanni and other orthodox Catholics had scourged the sins of Church and State, could now be printed only in Protestant countries. Anything might be prohibited that shocked the prejudice or surpassed the comprehension of an ignorant and bigoted priest. Authors were discouraged from writing, booksellers from publishing, and readers from reading, while the frivolous pedantry and execrable taste of the Jesuits infected almost all the schools. Renaissance had become reaction; the new birth had passed into the second death. This iron despotism could not be perpetually maintained. It was impossible to shut Italians out from all knowledge

of the intellectual progress of Protestant countries, nor in the universal flux of things could the stern inquisitorial type of ecclesiastical ruler be stereotyped for ever. In course of time the *zelanti* Popes gave way to affable and humane personages, but the nation had meanwhile sunk into a mental torpor, in which, with a few glorious exceptions, it remained plunged until the crash of the old order of things in the French Revolution. The exclusion of the vivifying spirit of the Reformation, the impossibility of so much as alluding, except in disparagement, to the chief transaction of contemporary history, indicate an emasculation, as well as a paralysis, beyond the power of language to express.

The extinction of the free spirit of the Renaissance was the more unfortunate for Italy, as it arrested the development of speculative and scientific research which seemed opening upon her. It has been frequently observed that the close of a brilliant literary epoch has coincided with the birth of an era of positive science. The early Greek philosophers follow Homer and the rhapsodists; Aristotle and Theophrastus, Epicurus and Zeno, succeed the dramatists and the orators; the decline of Latin literature is the age of the illustrious jurists. Even so, as the great authors and the great artists departed from Italy, she produced her greatest man of science, and a bold school of philosophers arose to challenge the authority to which Dante and Aquinas had bowed. "Philosophy," says Symonds, "took a new point of departure among the Italians, and all the fundamental ideas which have since formed the staple of modern European systems were anticipated by a few obscure thinkers."

The chief representative of physical science, however,

was by no means obscure. GALILEO GALILEI was born in 1564, the year of the death of Michael Angelo. The scientific achievements of this mighty genius do not concern us as such. It must not be forgotten, however, that he was also an accomplished author in the vernacular. His immortal Dialogue (1632), the glory and the shame of his age, is written in Italian, and is enumerated by Italians among exemplars of diction, *testi di lingua*. What he might have accomplished if he had enjoyed the applause and sympathy which greeted a Newton is difficult to say; but the contrast between the lot of the Master of the Mint and the President of the Royal Society on the one hand, and that of the lonely captive on the other, is not greater than that between the condition of England and that of Italy. It is needless to relate the oft-told story of Galileo, which indeed rather regards the history of science than that of literature. We are only concerned with him as a typical figure, the most eminent victim of the spirit of persecution which deprived Italy of her supremacy among intellectual nations, and which, even before Galileo had excited its hatred, had claimed another victim, less illustrious, but not less interesting.

It is probably owing to the considerable infusion of Greek blood into Naples and Sicily that the inhabitants of these regions, so backward in many respects in comparison with the rest of Italy, have displayed a peculiar genius for philosophical research. Aquinas was a Neapolitan, and in our own day the subtleties of German metaphysics have found a more sympathetic reception and a more ready comprehension in the South than elsewhere in Italy. The four chief Italian thinkers of the late sixteenth and early seven-

teenth centuries belonged to the kingdom of Naples. BERNARDO TELESIO (1509–85) has missed the posthumous celebrity of the others by escaping their tragic fate; but his reputation in his own day was greater than theirs. Campanella wept at his tomb, and Bacon calls him the first experimental observer of nature. He led the way in the revolt against the authority of Aristotle which became general in the seventeenth century, and his sensationalism helped to mould the thought of Hobbes and Gassendi.

A fiery martyrdom, a sublimely poetical mind, and an intuition of modern views and discoveries have made GIORDANO BRUNO a more celebrated and interesting figure than Telesio, although too far in advance of his contemporaries and too late recognised by posterity to be influential with either. "The most faithful and pithily condensed abstract of Bruno's philosophy," says Symonds, "is contained in Goethe's poem, *Prôömium zu Gott und Welt.* Yet this poem expresses Goethe's thought, and it is doubtful whether Goethe had studied Bruno except in the work of his disciple, Spinoza." "Disciple," it may be added, is much too strong a word to express the Hebrew thinker's relation to the Neapolitan. It would be difficult to conceive two men more dissimilar, except in intellectual intrepidity and in love of truth. Spinoza is the closest of reasoners, without a particle of poetry in his composition. Bruno has magnificent divinations, with little reasoning power. If Spinoza did read him, he must have been greatly annoyed by him. On the other hand, the celebrated definition, "A God-intoxicated man," which seems so inappropriate to the intellectual geometer of Amsterdam, absolutely fits the rapt Neapolitan prophet of the essen-

tial unity of all things. The same vehemence which we have remarked in Neapolitan men of letters—Pontano, Tansillo, Basile — combines in Bruno with the metaphysical instinct of the race to form a poet-philosopher, as incoherent as if he had just emerged from the Sibyl's cave, but full of the most surprising intuitions, instinct with the germs of modern thought and discovery. His very incoherence seems a claim to reverence; it does not convey the impression of intellectual inadequacy, but rather of an inspired message transcending mortal powers of speech. A chastened taste cannot but be offended by the drollery and burlesque which, like a true Neapolitan, Bruno blends with daring speculation and serious reflection, as well as by his gaudy rhetoric and exaggerated euphuism; yet Symonds is right in observing that "when the real divine œstrum descends upon him the thought is simple, the diction direct; the attitude of mind and the turn of expression are singularly living, surprisingly modern."

Like Galileo, Bruno chose the dialogue as the most convenient form of propagating his opinions, and unlike most contemporary philosophers, claims a place among vernacular writers. In his *Spaccio della Bestia Trionfante* and his comedy *Il Candelaio* he is satirical; metaphysically speculative in the *Cena delle Ceneri*, *Della Causa*, and *Dell' Infinito Universo;* but perhaps the most interesting of his works is *Gli Eroici Furori*, dedicated to Sir Philip Sidney, a dithyramb in prose and verse on the progress of the soul to union with the Divinity. It may be too much to say with the English translator that in this remarkable book the author "lays down the basis for the religion of thought and science"; but

it is true that the ordinary ecclesiastical ideals are thrust aside, and progress in truth, knowledge, and justice declared to be the end of man. If many had thought so, none had said it so openly. Bruno, however, never learned to observe, and remained all his life the metaphysician and the poet. Chief among his intuitions, after his perception of the unity of all existence, must be placed his instinctive recognition of the immense revolution which the acceptance of the Copernican theory must effect in religious belief. It is probable that he thus alarmed the priesthood ere he could arouse the laity, and that to him must be ascribed the persecution of Galileo, nearly a century after Copernicus had been permitted to dedicate his treatise to the Pope.

Bruno's own martyrdom had preceded Galileo's; he suffered death in February 1600, after a life of constant flight and exile, which at one time brought him to England, where he lectured at Oxford and became Sidney's friend, and latterly of imprisonment. His fate is a striking illustration of the dismal though inevitable change that had come over the spirit of the ecclesiastical rulers: a Renaissance Pope would probably have protected him. His name long seemed forgotten, and his writings obliterated. Early in the eighteenth century interest in him revived, as is shown by the collection of his works in Lord Sunderland's library. Brucker gave an intelligible digest of his opinions; Schelling avowedly sought inspiration from him; Coleridge names him with Dante and Ariosto as one of the three most representative Italians; and at present, even though he be chiefly efficient through his influence on more disciplined geniuses and more systematic thinkers, the world

has hardly a more striking example of the truth, "The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner."

As Bruno is the personification of martyrdom in the cause of philosophical speculation, another Neapolitan philosopher of the age, the Dominican TOMMASO CAMPANELLA (1568–1639) represents martyrdom for the sake of country. Campanella is not only a less important figure than Bruno, but less sane and practical. With all his extravagance, Bruno is no visionary; if he sometimes appears obscure and confused, the defect is not in the brain, but in the tongue. Campanella, though endowed with profound ideas, was a visionary who based his hopes of delivering his country from the Spanish yoke on predictions of the millennium, to be fulfilled by the advent of the Turks, and was sufficiently paradoxical to dream of a perfect republic in the kingdom of Naples. But this alliance of mental unsoundness with extraordinary intelligence renders him deeply interesting; unlike the frank and candid Bruno, he is one of the *problematische Naturen* who, as Goethe justly says, perpetually attract mankind. The flower of his life (1599–1625) was spent in prison, and some of it in torture, on account of a conspiracy which, after all the investigations of Signor Amabile, remains in many respects obscure, but which was undoubtedly designed to free Naples from the yoke, not only of Spain, but of Rome.

Released at length, Campanella successively found an asylum at Rome and at Paris, where he died in 1639. As his captivity became milder, he had been permitted to write, and to receive visits from friends, through whom his works found their way to the public. They

are mostly of a political character. The chief, *De Sensu et Magia Naturali*, is a curious blending of philosophy and occultism; another, a defence of Galileo, does him honour, even though he afterwards changed his view; but another, *De Monarchia Universali*, seeks to revive the mediæval idea of the universal Church and the universal Empire, substituting Spain for Germany. Until the rediscovery of his poems, his literary reputation principally rested upon one of his slightest productions, his *City of the Sun*, an Utopian picture of a perfect community. It contains a remarkable anticipation of the steamboat: "They possess rafts and triremes which go over the waters without rowers or the force of the wind, but by a marvellous contrivance. And other vessels they have which are moved by the winds."

Campanella's claims as a vernacular writer rest entirely upon his poems, of which there are said to have been seven books. With the exception of some extracted from the documents of his trial by the diligence of Signor Amabile, all that remain are the sonnets printed in Germany by his disciple, Tobias Adami, in 1622, and forgotten until their republication by Orelli, in 1834. But for these pieces we should not know the real Campanella, whom they exhibit in a more favourable light, even as a thinker, than does the brilliant intuition, chequered with gross credulity, of his professedly philosophical writings. Like Michael Angelo's, they are rather hewn than written—the utterances of a powerful intellect and a passionate heart seeking to express themselves through a medium but imperfectly mastered, hence vehement, abrupt, contorted even to the verge of absurdity, but full of substance, and as remote

as possible from the polished inanity which is so frequently a reproach to the Italian sonnet. Addington Symonds, wrestling with Campanella as Campanella wrestled with his own language, has produced excellent translations, accompanied by a careful commentary. "That this sonnet," he says of the following, "should have been written by a Dominican monk, in a Neapolitan prison, in the first half of the seventeenth century, is truly noteworthy:"

> "*The people is a beast of muddy brain*
> *That knows not its own force, and therefore stands*
> *Loaded with wood and stone; the powerless hands*
> *Of a mere child guide it with bit and rein.*
> *One kick would be enough to break the chain;*
> *But the beast fears, and what the child demands*
> *It does; nor its own terror understands,*
> *Confused and stupefied by bugbears vain.*
> *Most wonderful! with its own hand it ties*
> *And gags itself—gives itself death and war*
> *For pence doled out by kings from its own store.*
> *Its own are all things between earth and heaven;*
> *But this it knows not, and if one arise*
> *To tell this truth, it kills him unforgiven.*"

Some of Campanella's other sonnets are very striking, especially his impassioned remonstrance with the free Swiss for hiring themselves out to Italian despots. His religious pieces are characterised by a devout tone, and an unshakeable reliance upon Providence. His creed, like Bruno's, is pantheistic. The same is the case with another Neapolitan thinker of less importance, GIULIO CESARE VANINI (1585–1626), whose misunderstood pantheism caused him to be burned at Toulouse, the most intolerant city in France. His writings are in Latin, but so characteristically Italian in spirit as to deserve the

attention of Italian students. Out of many which he composed, only two were printed. The *Amphitheatre* is, in the opinion of Mr. Owen (*Sceptics of the Italian Renaissance*), decidedly orthodox, the *Dialogues* are as decidedly free-thinking, but it is not always quite clear how far the author is speaking in his own person.

While these adventurous speculators were infusing a ferment into the quiescent thought of their day, the edifice of modern jurisprudence was receiving important additions from Alberico Gentili, a Protestant exile, happily in safety at Oxford, whose works, nevertheless, belong rather to moral science than to literature. Much at the same time prose literature was enriched by the ethical prolusions of the most distinguished poet of the age. Though suffering from delusions sometimes amounting to frenzy, Tasso's brain was clear on all subjects to which these delusions did not extend. He could reason powerfully and gracefully on any question of taste or morals, arrange his ideas with symmetry, and support his views with appropriate quotations. The form which he adopted was the dialogue, requiring not only judgment and memory, but an accurate discrimination between the interlocutors, which he always maintains. Even the discourse with his familiar spirit, although composed in the hospital for lunatics, and containing many fantastic notions, is consecutive and rational. It is perhaps the most interesting of any, from its close relation to the writer; although almost as much may be said for the *Gonzaga*, in which Tasso celebrates the noble conduct of his father in preferring public duty to private interest; and the *Paterfamilias*, in which he describes a personal adventure. His other [illegible] all models of elegance and urbanity, usually

treat of those virtues which enter most especially into the character of a gentleman, and his own bad success at courts does not discourage him from tendering advice to courtiers.

A more powerful intellect if a less accomplished pen than Tasso's forms a connecting link between the science, alike moral and physical, and the historical erudition of the age. PIETRO SARPI (1552–1623) would in our day have been a great natural philosopher; and in fact, notwithstanding his profound knowledge both of theology and canon law, his reputation long principally rested upon his experiments and researches in optics, anatomy, and other natural sciences. Paul the Fifth's aggression upon Sarpi's native Venice in a matter of ecclesiastical jurisdiction summoned the modest friar to public life, and after the triumphant issue of the controversy in which he had borne the chief part, he turned to write the history of the momentous assembly which had so deeply affected the character of the Church of Rome for good and ill—the Council of Trent. As a liberal thinker, whose creed approached without quite attaining the Protestant standpoint, he was naturally hostile to a convocation which had stereotyped so many corruptions; while as an ecclesiastical statesman he was well able to penetrate the worldly motives which had actuated its conveners from first to last. The substantial truth of his view of it is generally admitted; it remains a question how far he has dealt conscientiously with his materials. The equitable Ranke subjects both him and the antagonistic historian, Cardinal Sforza Pallavicino, to a close scrutiny, and finds himself unable to entirely acquit or condemn either of them. Both have frequently displayed a praiseworthy fairness under strong temptation to garble

the documents before them, but neither has always resisted the inducement to magnify or minimise evidence in accordance with his prepossessions. Sarpi's main fault is a disposition to interpret every document in the light of his own times, when the pretensions of the Papacy had greatly risen, and its spirit had become more inflexible and despotic. This, however it may detract from the value of his history, was pardonable in one who had taken a leading part in resisting the most arrogant of the Popes, and had been left for dead by assassins, suborned, as generally believed, by the Papal court. As an advocate, Sarpi is far superior to his verbose though often ingenious antagonist; as an historian, Ranke places him immediately after Machiavelli. As a man, he appears sublimed by study and suffering into an incarnation of pure intellect, passionless except in his zeal for truth and freedom and his devotion to the Republic. "Let us," he nobly said when the Pope hurled his interdict at Venice—"let us be Venetians first and Christians afterwards."

The secular historians of the period are very numerous, but, with the exception of the Latinist Strada, only two have attained a durable celebrity. Enrico Caterino Davila (1576–1631), who had become well acquainted with French affairs by military service in the wars of religion, wrote the history of these contests from 1558 to 1598 "with Venetian sagacity and soldierly brevity." He wants few of the qualifications of an excellent historian, and his history is placed not far below that of Guicciardini, to which, indeed, it is preferred by Macaulay. He is accused, however, of affecting more penetration than he possessed into the secret counsels of princes. Cardinal Guido Bentivoglio's history of the

revolt of the Low Countries against the Spaniards (1558–1609) is necessarily defective as coming from the wrong side. Such a history could not be adequately written without sympathy with its heroes and comprehension of the principles involved, neither of which could be expected from a Papal nuncio. Bentivoglio nevertheless writes with reasonable impartiality, and is well informed on the exterior of the transactions he records, though utterly blind to their real significance. His style is most agreeable. His relation of his mission as nuncio, with speculations on the possibility of suppressing the Reformation in England and elsewhere, is perhaps more intrinsically valuable than his history; and his memoirs of his own career at the Papal court, though necessarily worded with great reserve and caution, are both entertaining and instructive. He was born in 1577, and died in conclave in 1644, just as he seemed about to be elected Pope; done to death, Nicius Erythræus affirms, by the snoring of the Cardinal in the next cell, which deprived him of sleep for eleven successive nights.

All the authors we have mentioned, though for the most part writing in the seventeenth century, were born in the sixteenth. The seventeenth century was far advanced towards its close ere it had produced a single prose-writer of literary importance, although some of its numerous penmen were interesting for their characters or the circumstances of their lives. Bartoli's *History of the Society of Jesus* is badly executed, but important from its subject. GREGORIO LETI was the most representative figure, personifying the spirit of revolt against tyranny spiritual and political. Born at Milan in 1630, he emigrated to Geneva, became a Protestant, and, after a roving life, eventually settled at Amsterdam,

where he died historiographer of the city in 1701. He had already constituted himself a historiographer and biographer general, writing the lives of kings, princes, and governors, and depicting the rise and fall of states, as fast as bookseller could commission, or printer put into type. Yet he is not a hack writer, but has an individuality of his own, and although his works are devoid of scientific worth, they served a useful purpose in their day by asserting freedom of speech. Their value is in proportion to the degree in which they subserve this purpose; the most important, therefore, are his lives of Sixtus V. and of Innocent the Tenth's rapacious and imperious niece, Olimpia Maldachini. Ranke has clearly shown that the former, which has done more than any other book to determine popular opinion regarding Sixtus, is mainly derived from MS. authorities of little value; which proves that Leti did not invent, but also that he did not discriminate.

Several other writers approached Leti's type, of whom Tomasi, the author of a very uncritical life of Cæsar Borgia, may be taken as a specimen. Two emigrant Italians, Siri and Marana, ministered successfully to the growing appetite for news and political criticism, soon to engender regular journalism; the former by his *Mercurio*, published irregularly from 1644 to 1682; the latter by his ingenious *Turkish Spy*. Ferrante Pallavicino enlivened the general dulness by his *Divorzio Celeste*, a conception worthy of Lucian, though not worked out as Lucian would have wrought it, and other satires which eventually cost him his life. TRAJANO BOCCALINI, nearer the commencement of the century, had treated political as well as literary affairs with freedom in his *News from Parnassus*, in which he professed to impart

information respecting transactions in the kingdom of Apollo. The fiction was greatly admired in its day, translated into most European languages, and probably exerted considerable influence upon Quevedo, Swift, and Addison. Boccalini also distinguished himself as a commentator on Tacitus, a writer much studied at this epoch of general gloom and discouragement, and as the author of an exposure of the weakness of the Spanish monarchy, which is said to have occasioned his assassination.

The one writer, however, whom it is possible to admire without qualification, and who has preserved his freshness to our own day, is a traveller, PIETRO DELLA VALLE, who between 1614 and 1626 explored Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Persia, and part of India. Apart from the prejudices inevitable in his age and country, Della Valle is the model of an observant and sagacious voyager, and the letters in which his observations are recorded form most delightful reading. Later in the century excellent letters on scientific subjects were written by Magalotti and Redi. The illustrious naturalists who in some measure redeemed the intellectual barrenness of the epoch, do not fall within the domain of literary history, which, except for some poets, is one of ever-augmenting inanity and insipidity, culminating in absolute sterility. A second Greece had been enslaved, but this time the fierce conqueror refused to be himself led into captivity. Spain and the Papacy and their victim were equally useless to culture, which would have perished from the earth had it still been confined to the fair land

> "*Begirt by wall of Alp and azure sea,*
> *And cloven by the ridges Apennine.*"

CHAPTER XX

THE POETRY OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

THE blight that fell upon Italian literature near the close of the sixteenth century was in the main to be ascribed to tyranny, temporal and spiritual. Yet there was another source of ill for which neither monarch nor priest was responsible: this was the malady which necessarily befalls every form of literature and art when the bounds of perfection have been reached, the craving to improve upon what is incapable of improvement; first, perhaps, distinctly evinced in this age by the Spanish bishop Guevara, author of the *Dial of Princes* (1529), who invented what he called the *estilo alto*, which, if not absolutely the predominant, had by the end of the century become a conspicuous element in every European literature. The true course would have been a new departure like that made by the Spanish and Dutch masters when Italian art had fulfilled its mission; but this requires not only genius, but the concurrence of favourable social and political circumstances, without which nothing is possible but servile repetition or preposterous exaggeration. Genius born amid inauspicious surroundings is more prone to elect the latter than the former alternative, and the greater the natural gift, the more outrageous the abuse likely to be made of it.

Such epidemics are of no unfrequent occurrence in

the history of every literature; but at the beginning of the seventeenth century the plague was common to all, and it was but natural that none should suffer so severely as that which had hitherto been the model of good taste. There seems no good reason for attributing this particular affliction to Spanish influence. Spain had her Gongora, as Italy her Marini, but there is no evidence that either taught the other. It was a prevalent malady, which left Italian prose by no means unaffected. Cardinal Bentivoglio, himself a model of pure and simple composition in prose, though in verse an admirer of Marini, says of the poet Ciampoli, redactor of briefs under Clement VIII., that his style would have been in place if he had been inditing an heroic poem. Ciampoli's poetry was not likely to be more chastened than his prose; and in truth the determination to dazzle and astonish at any cost was inevitably most conspicuous in the branch of literature where a divine transport, when real and not simulated, is rightly held to excuse many lapses from absolute purity of diction; and where, as was also to be expected, the arch offender was a man of genuine gifts, who with more natural refinement and moral earnestness might have regenerated the literature of his country, but whose false brilliancy only served to lure it further astray.

It is the best apology of GIOVANNI BATTISTA MARINI (1569–1625) to have been born a Neapolitan. From the days of Statius till now, these vehement children of the South have been great improvisers. Could we look upon Marini in this light, we should find little but his voluptuousness to censure, and should be compelled to admire him in some measure as a remarkable phenomenon, only lamenting that his contemporaries should have

mistaken a *lusus naturæ* for an inspired genius, a calculating boy for a Newton or a Galileo. It might indeed have been better for Marini if he had trusted more to his natural faculty for improvisation. "His first strokes," says Settembrini, "are sometimes beautiful, and if he left them as they were all would be well, but he touches and retouches until they are quite blurred." This refers to the descriptions in his *Adone* (1623), a poem which is nothing but description. Adonis does nothing, but is carried involuntarily through a series of situations contrived to display the pictorial power of the poet. The showman makes the puppet dance, and the puppet returns the compliment. There is no story, no moral, no character, no inner unity, nothing but forty-five thousand lines of word-painting, rich and brilliant indeed, but commonplace in so far as the poet sees nothing invisible to ordinary eyes, and evinces no originality in his manner of regarding man and nature.

Such merely verbal beauty must inevitably satiate, and Marini has experienced more neglect, and even contempt, than many men of far inferior faculty. In his own day he carried all before him, and was even more admired in France than in Italy. It is at least to his credit not to have undertaken his gorgeous but empty *Adone* until he had convinced himself of his inability to vie with Tasso in a nobler form of epic. He also composed one really dignified poem on the deplorable condition of Italy (attributed, however, by many to Fulvio Testi), and poured forth a flood of idyllic and bucolic, marine, erotic, and lyrical poetry, not devoid of striking beauties, but so disfigured by conceits as to be necessarily condemned to oblivion upon the revival of a purer taste. In some respects he might be compared to

the Cowleys and Crashaws of Charles the First's time; but he is physical, while they are metaphysical; his conceits are less far-fetched and ingenious than theirs, and few of them either could or would have produced his licentious, but, in an artistic point of view, admirable *Pastorella*. Marini's influence on the contemporary poetry of his own country was very great; but the two or three men of genius remained unaffected by him, and the names of his multitudinous imitators are not worth preserving. His life, though chequered by scrapes and quarrels, was on the whole prosperous, and the patronage of the French court made him independent of the petty princes of Italy. He had bitter enemies in Gasparo Murtola, a poet who would be forgotten but for his and Marini's mutual lampoons, and Tommaso Stigliani, a more considerable personage, who had enjoyed the great honour of being run through the body by the historian Davila, and whose early promise had drawn a sonnet from Tasso, remarkable for the hint it affords that Tasso himself had projected an epic upon Columbus:

"*Thy song Orphean, able to placate*
The Stygian thrones, and wailing shades appease,
Stiglian, doth so upon my spirit seize,
Mine own in its compare I humbly rate.
And if like Autumn with thy April mate
As promised by such harbingers as these,
Thou'lt pass the pillared bounds of Hercules,
And safe to utmost Thule navigate.
Now, parted from the crowd, intrepid go,
Scaling steep Helicon, thy high desire,
No more in dread to wander to and fro.
There swaying from a cypress hangs my lyre;
Salute it in my name, and bid it know
That Time and Fortune for my ill conspire."

The peculiar appropriateness of Tasso's compliment arises from the fact that Stigliani was then engaged upon an epic on the discovery of America, which was far from justifying Torquato's predictions.

The style of Marini, however, was not allowed to bear unchallenged sway. The first place in lyrical poetry was boldly claimed by, and by many accorded to, another bard, whose personal and poetical idiosyncrasies stood in strong contrast to the Neapolitan's. GABRIELLO CHIABRERA (1552–1637), a native of Savona, was a man of antique mould, haughty, aspiring, and self-sufficing. His youth was spent at Rome. Jealous of his honour, he found himself, as he tells us in his autobiography, necessitated to wash out sundry affronts in blood, which he accomplished to his satisfaction, but whether in single combat or in other fashion he does not explicitly say. Retired for safety to his native Ligurian town, and digesting the large assortment of ideas which he had brought away with him from the literary circles of Rome, he hit upon the great discovery of his life, that the Italian canzone needed to be reformed upon a Greek model. It really was a discovery which changed the whole course of his literary activity—of no such importance as that of the need of a closer observation of nature which Wordsworth deduced from noticing the blackness of a leaf outlined against a sunny sky, but still a genuine discovery. Its value lay not so much in its abstract worth or in any real assimilation of the spirit of Greek poetry by Chiabrera, but in an endeavour after a high standard, which, even when misdirected, proved the best corrective of the inanity and effeminacy to which the Italian canzone had become prone.

Chiabrera might be somewhat conventional in style

and barren in thought: he was all the more a precious antidote to the dissolute lusciousness of a Marini, and his example exercised a salutary influence throughout the whole of the seventeenth century. So late as 1740, Spence, travelling in Italy, was told that the Italian lyrical poets of the day were divisible into Petrarchists and Chiabrerists. The popularity of so bold an innovator, and the honours and distinctions showered upon him by princes and potentates, are creditable to the age. He wrote his brief autobiography at eighty, and died at eighty-five, exulting to the last in his sanity of mind and body; distinguished also, according to Rossi (Nicius Erythræus), as the ugliest of the poets: "Quis enim qui ejus faciem aspexisset, arbitratus esset, ex illius ore subnigro, tetrico, invenusto, tam candidula, tam vinula, tam venustula carmina posse prodere?" A man congenial to Wordsworth, who has translated some of his stately metrical epitaphs with corresponding dignity.[1] He has many traits of those great modern masters of form, Landor and Platen, but, though no mean sculptor of speech, falls as much behind them in perfection of classic mould as he surpasses them in productiveness.

Chiabrera wrote several epics, dramas, poems on sacred history, and other pieces, and the mass of his poetry is of formidable extent; but apart from his *Sermoni*, felicitous imitations of Horace, he lives solely by his lyrics. These fall into two classes, which he would have described as Pindaric and Anacreontic.

[1] It is not improbable that the "three feet long and two feet wide," which brought such ridicule upon Wordsworth, may be a reminiscence of Chiabrera's description of his house, "Di cui l'ampiezza venticinque braccia Forse consume."

The former are set compositions of great pomp and magnificence; not like Marini's poems, depending upon verbal beauty alone, but upon a real if formal grandeur of style. They are less like the notes of Apollo's lyre than orchestras of all sorts of instruments, "flute, violin, bassoon," but more particularly bassoon. They are splendidly sonorous, and exhibit great art in heightening ordinary ideas by magnificent diction. Of the wild, untutored graces of the woods and fields they have absolutely nothing; their sphere is the court, save for the feeling which Chiabrera, as becomes a Ligurian, occasionally manifests for the sea; and the ideas are seldom absolutely novel, though they often seem so. But there is true elevation of thought and majesty of diction: a lyrical afflatus seems to descend upon the poet and whirl him on, sped, in the absence of a really inspiring subject, by his own excitement, as a courser is urged along by the thunder of his own hoofs. Yet there is no factitious emotion, the theme is really for the moment everything to the poet, while he remains sufficiently master of himself to turn every strong point to the best account.

Like the surviving lyrics of his model Pindar, his odes are usually addressed to particular persons or prompted by some event. Among the best are the long series he poured forth on occasion of the trifling victories gained by the Italian galleys over the Turks, which prove how fine a patriotic poet he might have been if his age had given him anything better to celebrate. His Anacreontics precisely correspond to his Pindarics, brilliant effusions with more glitter than glow, but ingenious, felicitous, and transcending mere rhetoric by the exquisite music of the versification. Chiabrera is not an Italian Pindar or Anacreon, and his natural gift for poetry was inferior

to Marini's; but he is entitled to the great honour of having barred out by a strong dike the flood of false taste, and having conferred dignity upon a most unpropitious age of Italian literature.

Chiabrera's mantle fell upon Count FULVIO TESTI (1593–1646), in some respects a more genuine poet, though his inferior in splendour of language and harmony of versification, and like him infertile in ideas and contracted in his outlook upon the world. Testi was nevertheless an interesting personage, picturesque in the style of Rembrandt or Caravaggio, an unquiet spirit, haughty, moody, vindictive. Under a free government he might have been a great citizen, but the circumstances of his age left him no other sphere than court or diplomatic employment. He was not the man to run easily in harness, and spent his life in losing and regaining the favour of the Este princes, now come down to be Dukes of Modena, but still with places and pensions in their gift, and died in prison, just as, if the Duke may be believed, he was on the point of being released. If so, the cause of his disgrace was probably nothing graver than his wish to quit the Duke's service. In any case, the tale of his having been secretly decapitated to appease the resentment of Cardinal Antonio Barberini, satirised in his famous canzone, *Ruscelletto orgoglioso*, seems to be a mere legend.

This canzone is undoubtedly one of the finest lyrics in the Italian language, magnificent alike in its description of the swollen rivulet and in its application to the inflated upstart. The rest of Testi's better compositions resemble it; they are odes stately in diction and sonorous in versification, fine examples of the grand style in poetry, and proving what dignity of style can

effect even without any considerable opulence or striking novelty of thought. They are usually on subjects personal to himself, sometimes depicting the miseries of court life with the feeling that comes from experience, sometimes affecting a philosophical tranquillity to which he was really a stranger. One stands out from the rest, the poem which he addressed in his youth to the Duke of Savoy, exhorting him to deliver Italy from the Spaniards. Testi was not alone in the prophetic foresight that the redemption of Italy would come from Savoy. Campanella, Chiabrera, and others of the best Italians of the day shared it with him, but no other has given it such direct and eloquent expression. The genius of Italy appears in vision to the poet, enumerates her wrongs, denounces her oppressor, and calls for vengeance in a series of most animated octaves, equally impressive and persuasive.

Marini's school continued to dominate literary circles, although Rossi assures us that Testi's simplicity was more acceptable to readers at large. "The sun," says Vernon Lee, "cooled itself in the waters of rivers which were on fire; the celestial sieve, resplendent with shining holes, was swept by the bristly back of the Apennines; love was an infernal heaven and a celestial hell, it was burning ice and freezing fire, and was inspired by ladies made up entirely of coral, gold thread, lilies, roses, and ivory, on whose lips sat Cupids shooting arrows which were snakes." Poetry worthy of the name seemed extinct after Testi's death, and the literature of England being then unknown beyond her own borders, the sceptre over every department of intellectual activity except science passed into the hand of France. After a while, however, signs of revival became

apparent. The writers who restored to Italy some share of her ancient glory were all strongly influenced by Chiabrera.

The first of these in order of time was a man who would have been famous if he had never written a verse, FRANCESCO REDI (1626–99), the illustrious physician and naturalist. One would scarcely have expected this eager scrutiniser of nature to have come forward as a Bacchanalian laureate; but certain it is that, neglecting the more imposing side of Chiabrera's poetical work, Redi applied himself to develop the dithyramb in its strict sense of a Bacchic song. Chiabrera had given excellent examples of this on a small scale; but Redi completely distanced him with his *Bacchus in Tuscany*, where the jolly god, returned from his Indian conquest, for the benefit of Ariadne passes in review literally and figuratively all the wines of Tuscany, with such consequences as is reasonable to expect. The literary character of the piece cannot be better described than by Salfi, the continuator of Ginguené, as "consisting in the enthusiasm which passes rapidly from one theme to another, and, seeming to say nothing but what it chooses, says, in effect, nothing but what it should." Dryden evidently had it in mind when he wrote *Alexander's Feast*, and the difficulties of translation have been surprisingly overcome by Leigh Hunt. Redi's sonnets are also remarkable, occasionally tame in subject or disfigured by conceits, but in general nobly thought and nobly expressed, with a strong Platonic element. They nearly all relate to Love, and fall into two well-marked divisions, one upbraiding him as the source of perpetual torment, the other celebrating him as the symbol of Divinity, and the chief agent by which

man is raised above himself. The latter thought has seldom been more finely expressed than in the following pair of sonnets, the first of which is translated by Mr. Gosse:

"*Love is the Minstrel; for in God's own sight,*
The master of all melody, he stands,
And holds a golden rebeck in his hands,
And leads the chorus of the saints in light;
But ever and anon those chambers bright
Detain him not, for down to these low lands
He flies, and spreads his musical commands,
And teaches men some fresh divine delight.
For with his bow he strikes a single chord
Across a soul, and wakes in it desire
To grow more pure and lovely, and aspire
To that ethereal country where, outpoured
From myriad stars that stand before the Lord,
Love's harmonies are like a flame of fire."

"*If I am aught, it is Love's miracle,*
He to rough mass gave shape with forming file;
He, as youth bloomed in April's sunny smile,
Came through the eyes within the heart to dwell.
My Lord and Master he, who bade expel
All sordid thought and apprehension vile,
Sweetness bestowed on rude unmellowed style,
And melody that shall be memorable.
My spirit at his call her pinions bent
To wing the heavenly realm where Time is not;
From star to star he beckoned, and she went:
By him my heart hath chosen for her lot
True honour whose renown shall ne'er be spent;
If aught my soul hath borne, 'twas he begot."

Poets are often found to be gregarious. Redi had two chief friends at the Tuscan court—Menzini, of whom we shall have to speak, and Filicaja, who in an unpoetical age raised the Italian lyric to as great a height as it had

ever attained in the Cinque Cento. VINCENZO FILICAJA (1642–1707) is one of the highest examples the world has seen of the academical poet, the man who is rarely hurried away by the god, but who seriously and perseveringly follows poetry as an art, in whose breast the sacred fire is always burning, but always needing to be stirred up. A grave, just magistrate, and a deeply religious man, he was well constituted to sing events of such importance to the Christian commonwealth as the deliverance of Vienna by Sobieski, and, from his point of view, the conversion of Queen Christina. Tender, affectionate, and carrying with him the life-long wound of an unfortunate passion, he was no less qualified to be the laureate of domestic sorrow, while his elevation of mind lent uncommon dignity to many of his occasional pieces, especially his sonnets. If only his scrolls smelt less of the lamp he might deserve Macaulay's exaggerated praise as the greatest lyrist of modern times, supposing this expression to denote the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The great qualities of Filicaja are majesty and tenderness. The *non bene conveniunt nec in una sede morantur majestas et amor* only applies to him in so far as these gifts, though dwelling in the same breast, are not often found united in the same poem. His canzoni possess amplitude of form and pomp of diction, seldom or never bombastic, or transgressing the limits of good taste. From this the poet was preserved by his deep seriousness, to which anything like tinsel was utterly abhorrent. He strongly felt the obligation to exert his utmost strength when writing on an important theme, as he usually did when he wrote at all. It is his manner to approach his subject from a variety of sides, and

make each the topic of a separate poem. Thus his great cycle of odes on the relief of Vienna, perhaps the finest of his works, consists of six separate productions, constituting a grand whole, but any one of which could have stood perfectly well by itself. Such a method of composition implies great deliberation, and Filicaja rarely conveys the impression of a seer or a bard. His thoughts are sometimes trite, but the feeling which gives them birth is always deep and sincere. The same is true of the best of his numerous sonnets, some of which rise to grandeur. By far the finest is the famous *Italia, Italia, a cui feò la sorte*, which is to Italian literature what Milton's sonnet on the massacre of the Vaudois is to English :

> "*Italia, O Italia, doomed to wear*
> *The fatal wreath of loveliness, and so*
> *The record of illimitable woe*
> *Branded for ever on thy brow to bear!*
> *Would that less beauty or more vigour were*
> *Thy heritage! that they who madly glow*
> *For that which their own fury layeth low,*
> *More terrible might find thee, or less fair!*
> *Not from thine Alpine rampart should the horde*
> *Of spoilers then descend, or crimson stain*
> *Of rolling Po quench thirst of Gallic steed:*
> *Nor should'st thou, girded with another's sword,*
> *Smite with a foreign arm, enslavement's chain,*
> *Victor or vanquished, equally thy meed.*"

Filicaja, however, did not always compose in this majestic style. He could be light and playful. Some of his sonnets, like those of Tansillo and other writers of the Cinque Cento, strongly bring out the characteristic distinction between the Italian and the English sonnet, which is entirely in favour of the former. The

English sonnet, even when dealing with a light theme, is apt to be ponderous. The Italian, even when serious, is tuneful, and buoyant on the wing.

Filicaja fixed the model of the Italian canzone for a long time, for the innovations of his successor ALESSANDRO GUIDI (1650–1712), a protégé of Queen Christina, and one of the founders of the "Arcadia," had more admirers than imitators. They consisted in the irregularity and sometimes the disuse of rhyme, interesting as experiments, but unfavourable to the stately march of the most dignified form of lyrical composition. Guidi was nevertheless a fine poet, and manifests a peculiar fire and dignity when hymning the glories and tragedies of Rome. He must have been a very ermine among authors, if it be true that he died of disgust at a misprint in one of his books.

Three other poets who did not aspire to the elevation of Filicaja and Guidi, aided to re-enthrone sound taste, and did honour to the end of the seventeenth century. BENEDETTO MENZINI (1646–1704), another protégé of Christina's, and in some sense a pupil of Redi, wrote caustic satires, graceful Anacreontics, respectable odes, and an Art of Poetry as sound as could be expected from one whose knowledge of modern literature was so limited. To see, more than half a century after Shakespeare, the Solimano and the Torrismondo propounded as the highest modern examples of tragic art certainly inspires cogitation touching the serviceableness of the light within, supposing that light to be darkness. Within his limits, however, Menzini is most judicious, and his own compositions do credit to his [illegible]; witness the following keen satiric apologue in [illegible] et form:

"A tender slip of laurel I of late
Implanted in fair soil, and Heaven besought
To prosper till it might, to fulness brought,
Enshade the brow august of Laureate;
And Zephyrus to boot did supplicate
To fan with soothing wing, lest harm in aught
By bitter breath of Boreas should be wrought,
Loosed from the cave where Æolus holds state.
Tardy and difficult, full well I know,
The upward striving of Apollo's spray,
Matched with frail growths that lightly come and go;
Yet chide we not the fortunate delay,
If, when the bay is worthy of the brow,
Brow there be also worthy of the bay."

Carlo Maria Maggi (1630–99), without soaring high, did excellent work in ode, sonnet, and madrigal. Francesco Lemene (1634–1704) was more ambitious, but his tumid religious poetry has fallen into oblivion, and he only lives by his pretty Anacreontics.

As the great questions which had divided the preceding century became settled, and political interests narrowed more and more, the spirit of the age naturally turned to satire. Menzini is its best satirist; but at an earlier period Chiabrera, Soldani, and the impetuous and unequal Salvator Rosa had exercised themselves in this department of literature, and the century's last literary sensation was the successive appearance of the Latin satires of Sergardi (Sectanus), models of composition, which for nearly a decade kept the reading portion of the Roman public in an uproar. It might have been thought that comedy would have flourished, but some promising beginnings died away, while opera progressed steadily. Tragedies continued to be written on the classical system, but there was no power to breathe life into the old forms, unless the great tem-

porary success of Prospero Bonarelli's *Solimano*, which we have seen Menzini parallel with Tasso's *Torrismondo*, may be taken to denote an exception. The *Phillis of Scyros* of Bonarelli's brother Giudubaldo was the one achievement in pastoral drama. The novelette languished, and chivalric fiction had but one representative in Italy, the *Caloandro* of Giuseppe Ambrogio Marini, an excellent romance nevertheless, ending with five marriages, where monarchs and warriors play the part of the antiquated knights-errant, and so superior in sanity to the unwieldy fictions of the Clélie type that Caylus thought it worth translating into French in the following century. The *Eudemia* of J. V. Rossi (Nicius Erythræus), in Latin, is a good specimen of the *Argenis* class of romances. The same author's *Pinacotheca*, in three parts, a most entertaining repertory of biographies, chiefly more or less literary, of the early part of the century, is further remarkable as indicative of a perception of the growing needs of the world, and an unconscious foreshadowing of a culture as yet afar off. And this is broadly the character of the seventeenth century in Italy, a poor and barren time if paralleled with the past, but pregnant with the seeds of future harvests, repressed for a time by ungenial circumstances. Comparing the Italian literature of the seventeenth century with that of England and France, we see that all ran through substantially the same stages, but that, while these are vigorous alike in their aberrations and their reforms, Italian literature is languid in both, a circumstance sufficiently accounted for by its absolute enslavement, and their comparative freedom.

CHAPTER XXI

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

THE eighteenth century was a period of recovery for Italy. The ancient lustre of literature, indeed, was but feebly rekindled; and fine art, with the exception of music, which rose to unexampled heights, sank lower and lower. But an invigorating breath pervaded the nation; men wrote and thought in comparative freedom; and if pedantry and frivolity still reigned in many quarters, the sway of outrageous bad taste had departed. Political and spiritual tyranny were still enthroned, and religion and politics could only be handled with great caution; yet reform was more hardy and oppression less assured than of yore. Italy rose slowly from her abasement, like a trodden flower resuming its erect attitude, bruised but not crushed, feeble but not inanimate, obeying a natural impulse by which she could not fail to right herself in time.

The chief cause of Italian regeneration, so far as peculiar to the country, and unconnected with that general movement towards liberty and toleration which, originating in England, was gradually transforming Europe, was the disappearance of the Spanish dominion, which had for two centuries inflicted every political and spiritual evil upon Italy without conferring a single benefit in return. A Spanish dynasty did, indeed, in 1734

re-establish itself in the Two Sicilies, but no longer a dynasty of viceroys; it regarded itself as Italian, and was served by Italian administrators. Lombardy slumbered under the comparatively benign sway of Austria. There was as yet little patriotic resentment against foreign domination as such; Austria was inert and unaggressive, and Italy's princes and people felt conscious of a great deliverance. It was no time for violent intellectual exercise, but for quiet and gradual revival. The convalescing country could not be expected to vie with the intellectual development of England and France, but her progress was in the same direction. Within the Alps, as beyond them, the age, save in music, was unimaginative. It created little, but brought much to light. Its most potent intellects, the Kants, Lessings, Diderots, Butlers, Humes, were turned towards criticism or moral science. So it was in Italy, where the current of the most powerful thought ran strongly in the direction of history and jurisprudence, state reform and public economy. Vico, Giannone, Beccaria, Filangieri, Genovesi, Galiani are its representatives. Closely allied to these, but devoid of their originality, are the investigators of the past and the critical lawgivers of their own day, the Muratoris, Crescimbenis, Maffeis, Mazzuchellis, and Tiraboschis. Nor must the academical movement be left out of sight, which, if impotent to create good literature, at all events kept its traditions alive. Lastly, the development of music reacted on the lyrical drama, which kindled the other branches of the dramatic art into activity, and for a time made the Italian drama, tragic, comic, and operatic, the most interesting in Europe.

Among the philosophical writers who conferred so much distinction upon Italy in the eighteenth century,

the first, both in order of time and of importance, was GIOVANNI BATTISTA VICO, a Neapolitan (1668–1744). Vico's life was uneventful. He devoted his youth to the study of metaphysics and Roman law, spent some happy years in a tutorship in the country, and, returning to Naples, passed the remainder of his life in a conflict with poverty, deriving most of his income from adulating the great in complimentary verses. A small professorship of rhetoric eked out this precarious means of subsistence, and when the Spanish dynasty supplanted the Austrian in 1734, Charles III. conferred a pension upon him, but the aged philosopher was already sinking into a condition of imbecility. It seems surprising that he should have been able to publish so many important and far from remunerative books.

Vico's fame rests less upon any particular achievement than upon the general impression which he produces as a man greatly in advance of his age. His superiority in almost every branch of investigation except physical science, of which he knew little, arises from his unflinching application of a principle which he was almost the first of moderns to recognise, that man is to be viewed collectively. All individuals, all societies, all sciences, are thus concatenated and regarded as diverse aspects of a single all-comprehending unity. As a metaphysician and a jurist, Vico's claims to attention are very high, but do not properly fall within our scope. They are fully set forth by Professor Flint in his volume on Vico in Blackwood's Philosophical Classics. We can only treat of Vico where he comes into contact with history and literary criticism, as he does very remarkably in his criticisms upon Roman history and upon Homer. His investigations into Roman jurisprudence

showed him the untruth of the traditions of the Twelve Tables, and starting from this point, he anticipated almost everything subsequently brought forward by Niebuhr, although from his deficiency in exact philological knowledge his arguments were less conclusive. His scepticism respecting Homer was also the result of speculation; before the ballads of the mediæval period had been compared with the Homeric poems, he pronounced on the internal evidence of the latter, that they must be the work, not of a man, but of a nation. In both departments he may have gone too far, but his views are the divinations of an extraordinary genius. They are intimately connected with his speculations on history, which anticipate the general drift of modern thought by tending to put nations into the place of individuals, and to represent history as the product of an inevitable sequence of development. These views greatly influenced Herder and Turgot, and, through them, Europe. Vico's doctrine of the three stages through which human society passes was used, if it was not plagiarised, by Comte and Schelling.

Another great Neapolitan writer of the age, though working on a much smaller scale than Vico, attracted more notice from contemporaries, inasmuch as Vico seemed to deal merely with abstract things, while PIETRO GIANNONE came into rough contact with vested interests. Giannone, born at Ischitella, in Apulia, May 1676, went to the Neapolitan bar, and made the legal and ecclesiastical history of the kingdom his especial study. In his Civil History of the Kingdom of Naples (1723), the work of twenty years, he demonstrated the illegitimacy of the Papal claims to jurisdiction over ples, with a learning and research which, now that

these claims are no longer heard of, maintain his works in request as one of the highest authorities upon mediæval law. The more ordinary qualities of a historian are not manifested in the same measure, but Giannone's place is something quite apart. The book was received with gratitude and delight by the educated part of the public; but the monks, secretly prompted by the court of Rome, raised an outcry against Giannone as an unbeliever in St. Januarius, and he was compelled to fly the country. He found refuge successively in Vienna, Venice, and Geneva; but having been tempted into Savoy for the purpose of attending the Roman Catholic service, was seized and most iniquitously imprisoned by the King of Sardinia, the King Charles of Browning's drama, until his death in 1748, though he maintained all the time an amicable correspondence with the King and his minister D'Ormea. Notwithstanding the wrongs which he suffered from the house of Savoy, he foresaw and foretold its greatness and service to the nation. He imitated Machiavelli by exhorting the Italians to military discipline, and his principal work is epoch-making as a precursor of the great movement which tended to subject the Church to the civil power in the latter half of the eighteenth century. He also composed the *Triregno*, a review of the temporal power of the Church in general, which was so effectually sequestrated as to have remained unpublished until 1895. It is not quite complete. Giannone's autobiography, which comes down to a late period of his captivity, was published for the first time in 1891.

Giannone is rather a jurist than an historian, and the writers whose affinity to him is closest are not historians like Denina, but the legists and economists, Beccaria,

Filangieri, Genovesi, Galiani. Three of these distinguished men were Neapolitans, a circumstance significant alike of the lively genius of the people, and of the liberality of the government under Charles the Third and his enlightened minister Tanucci. The spirit of the Renaissance seemed to have returned in some measure; but the drift was not now to the classical art and the literature that had effected the spiritual emancipation of the former age, but to new theories of human rights and duties, and to the removal of restrictions from civic action and social intercourse. There probably never was a time since the age of Marcus Aurelius when philosophers attained nearer to royalty than in the age of Frederick and Catherine, and, were not vaster issues at stake than the improvement of human institutions, the same kind of regret might be felt at the French Revolution which some have expressed for the Reformation as a premature movement, destructive of safe and moderate reform.

In truth, however, the human spirit at both epochs needed regeneration; to have perpetuated the eighteenth-century type, admirable as this is in many respects, would have denoted consent to dwell in decencies for ever. CESARE BECCARIA (1738–94) and GAETANO FILANGIERI (175–287) were nevertheless great reformers, who, the former in his *Dei Delitti e delle Pene* (1763), the latter in his *Scienza della Legislazione* (1783), contributed greatly to overthrow mediæval notions of justice, and to infuse a humane spirit into legislation, not merely by the abolition of revolting and atrocious penalties, but by proposing the reformation of the criminal as a chief object of the lawgiver. This was the especial mission of Beccaria, who also introduced a very important prin-

ciple by his clear separation of the legislative and the judicial functions. Filangieri combats in particular the excessive interference of governments, while he foreshadows the logic and simplicity of a universal code in the future, realised in some measure by the Code Napoleon. ANTONIO GENOVESI (1712–69), the first to show the necessity of Italian unity, besides making important contributions to ethics and metaphysics, expounded freedom of trade and the laws that govern prices, in his *Lezioni di Commercio, o sia d'Economia Civile.* Free trade in corn had also a powerful champion in the witty Abate FERDINANDO GALIANI (1728–87), whose most important works, however, were written in French. Galiani adorned the circles of the encyclopædist philosophers at Paris, whose views on many points he soundly refuted, and who avenged themselves by comparing the explosive little Neapolitan to a pantomime incarnate. His discourse upon trade in corn was speedily translated into Italian, and gave him rank as an Italian classic; the best known of his vernacular writings is probably his humorous account of the alarm created by an eruption of Vesuvius.

After this group of economists—to whom the historian PIETRO VERRI may be added—should be recorded another of literary historians, eminently useful though not brilliant writers, and consummate men of letters. Of GIOVANNI MARIO CRESCIMBENI, the historian of Italian poetry, we shall have to speak in mentioning the Arcadian Academy, which he so largely contributed to found and maintain. He may be justly termed a pedant, but neither his book nor himself can be spared from Italian literary history. A much greater name is LODOVICO ANTONIO MURATORI (1672–1745), but his imperishable monument

was raised not as author but as editor. The publication of twenty-seven folio volumes of mediæval Italian historians displays a man singly equal to many learned societies. No one has stamped his name more deeply on the historical literature of his country than he has done by this publication, by his *Antiquitates Italicæ Medii Ævi*, and by his *Annali* from the Christian era to 1749. One of his original writings has an abiding place in literature, the *Della perfetta Poesia*, which indicates the high-water mark of good taste at the time of its publication. The affected style of the preceding century was then entirely out of fashion. On the negative side Muratori's taste is almost faultless, and he often manifests great discrimination in the appreciation of exquisite beauties. Unfortunately he is all for the delicate and graceful, and has little feeling for the really great, of which the Italy of the eighteenth century saw hardly so much as the counterfeit until, late in the secular period, Cesarotti produced his version of Ossian. Muratori venerates Dante rather than admires him; like Confucius, he respects the gods, but keeps them at a distance.

The learning and industry of Muratori were almost rivalled by Count SCIPIONE MAFFEI (1675–1755), the sovereign of contemporary Italian, almost of European archæologists, author of the famous tragedy of *Merope* and of the equally famed *Verona Illustrata;* and by Count Giovanni Maria Mazzuchelli (1707–65), who should have been the biographer-general of Italian men of letters, but who began his work on too large a scale for completion. GIROLAMO TIRABOSCHI (1731–94), librarian of the Duke of Modena, is the standard Italian literary historian. His great work has immortalised his name;

it will nevertheless disappoint those who resort to it in the expectation of encountering a history on the modern plan. It is not, strictly speaking, so much a history of literature as a history of learning. The fortunes of schools and universities, the rise and decay of particular branches of study, are narrated very fully, while there is little literary criticism, and the lives of great men are recounted with astonishing brevity, except when some personal or intellectual circumstance regarding them has become the theme of erudite controversy, when the incident overshadows the life. One of the most potent literary influences of the age was the *Giornale de' Letterati*, founded early in the century by Apostolo Zeno, which long served as a rallying-point for Italian literary men.

The number of historical works published in Italy during the eighteenth century was considerable, but they are chiefly monographs on local history, and, unless Verri's history of Lombardy be an exception, none gained the author the character of a philosophical historian save CARLO DENINA'S *Rivoluzioni d'Italia* (1768–72), a work so superior to the writer's other performances that it has been doubted whether he really wrote it. A valuable history of another description was produced by the ex-Jesuit LUIGI LANZI (1732–1811), also celebrated as an Etruscan scholar, in his *Storia Pittorica dell' Italia*, long ago superseded by more accurate research, but excellent for the time. Art criticism was promoted by FRANCESCO ALGAROTTI (1712–1764), chamberlain and friend of Frederick the Great, Carlyle's "young Venetian gentleman of elegance in dusky skin and very white linen," a most voluminous writer, "who," says the unmusical Carlyle, "took up

the opera in earnest manner as capable of being a school of virtue and the moral sublime," but whose chief title to fame is rather his popular exposition of the physics of Newton, a modest but meritorious service. Two miscellaneous writers deserve considerable attention. One is GIUSEPPE BARETTI (1719–86), "a wonderful, wild, coarse, tender, angry creature," says Vernon Lee; endeared to Englishmen as the friend of Johnson and of Reynolds, and the imitator of the *Spectator* in his *Frusta Litteraria*, although an Ishmael whose hand was against every contemporary, and who carried personality to lengths which Addison would have highly disapproved. The most entertaining of his writings are his lively letters from Spain and Portugal. The other is GASPARE GOZZI (1715–86), brother of the famous dramatist, who also imitated the *Spectator* in a periodical, wrote excellent stories in prose and verse, and rendered a durable service to literature by his defence of Dante against the aspersions of Bettinelli, preluding the Dantesque revival of the next century.

Contemporaneously with this development of moral and economical science, another active movement went on which created far more agitation among Italian literati, and which, if it scarcely enriched the national literature with a single work of merit, at all events kept up the tradition of poetry. This was the universal itch for rhyming which seized upon the nation about the beginning of the eighteenth century, and dates from the foundation of the Arcadian Academy in 1692. This epoch-making event is related with unsurpassable verve in the brilliant pages of Vernon Lee, who rekindles for us the chief lights of the institution and the time: the

frigid and sardonic, but really illustrious jurist Gravina, instructor of Montesquieu and of the Academy; the uncouth pedant but excellent administrator Crescimbeni, whose history of Italian poetry is a more valuable book than Vernon Lee allows; the fluent versifiers, not without gleams of a genuine poetical vein, Rolli and Frugoni; the marvellous improvisatore Perfetti, a sounding brass, but no tinkling cymbal, who actually received in the Capitol the crown awarded to Petrarch and designed for Tasso.

The seriousness with which these Alfesibeo Carios and Opico Erimanteos took themselves, their crooks and their wigs, is astonishing. But they got accepted at their own valuation, and none disputed their claims as the sovereign arbiters of elegant literature until, about 1760, Giuseppe Baretti arose to demonstrate that, as shepherds, they must be the representatives of the ancient Scythians. Settembrini in our own day rather opines that they were created by the Jesuits, just as the Cobbett of the *Rejected Addresses* denounces "the screw letters of rhyme, invented by the monks in the Middle Ages to enslave the people." Every city in Italy had its offshoot of the Arcadia; every member did something to approve his literary taste, were it but one of the hundred and fifty elegies, in all manner of languages, on the decease of Signor Balestrieri's cat (1741). The result was a deluge of insipid verse, preferable at any rate to the extravagance of the preceding century.

Two Arcadians alone evinced real poetical talent, the two Zappis of Imola. FELICE ZAPPI wrought on a small scale, but with exquisite perfection. His sonnets, madrigals, and lyrical trifles generally are among the very

choicest examples of Italian minor poetry for elegance, *esprit*, and melody. It is true that he exposed himself to the merciless ridicule of Baretti by dreaming that he stood upon his hind legs and barked madrigals in the character of his lady's lap-dog, but this lapse ought not to count against his genuine merits. His wife, Faustina, formerly Maratti, is more ambitious but less consummate. Her writings are nevertheless always estimable, and one sonnet is remarkable for an energy and vehemence sped straight from the heart :

"*Lady, on whom my Lord was wont to gaze*
Complacent so, that oft unto mine ear
Of thy abundant tress and aspect clear
And silvery speech he yet resounds the praise;
Tell me, when thou to him discourse didst raise,
Seemed he, immersed in musing, not to hear?
Or, as to me may chance, did look austere,
And moody frown his countenance deface?
Time was, I know, when passionate and weak
Thy fair eyes found him, and I know that, till—
But ah! what blushes mantle on thy cheek!
Thy glance declines to earth, thy eyelids thrill!
Answer, I pray thee—no! hush! never speak
If thou wouldst tell me that he loves thee still!"

All the minor Italian versifiers were speedily eclipsed by the genius of Metastasio, whose place, however, is with dramatic poets. But for him, the eighteenth century wore away without producing a poet of great mark, until, in 1763, Italy was startled by the appearance of the *Mattina*, the first part of the *Giorno* of GIUSEPPE PARINI. Parini is particularly interesting as the first eminent Italian poet who shows decided traces of English influence. The plan of his poem is taken from Thomson, the spirit is the spirit of Pope ; the net result

is much such a poem as Cowper might have written had he been an Italian. Just as Thomson in his *Seasons* depicts the entire course of Nature from four points of view, so Parini in his *Giorno* delineates the useless life of a frivolous young Italian of quality by exhibiting the occupations of his morning, afternoon, evening, and night. The spirit is that of Pope's satires, but Parini, composing in blank verse, has been led into a style more nearly resembling that of Young, although he has little of the sententious abruptness of the *Night Thoughts* or of their fatiguing glitter: the four poems are perfect wholes, gliding from theme to theme by the most ingenious and delicate transitions, and replete with charming episodes; the diction is exquisite, and the blank verse the best that Italy had then seen. The work is invaluable as a picture of manners, and a masterpiece of delicate polished satire; the *jeunesse dorée* of Milan is or ought to be made thoroughly ashamed of the vapidity of its existence, but every phrase is urbane, and all the ridicule dainty and ironical. The subject is hardly susceptible of high poetry, but Parini has adorned it as only a poet could. The composition of the remaining three parts occupied him for many years, and the last two are not quite complete. His minor pieces reveal the same remarkable power as the *Giorno* of elevating trifling circumstances into the region of poetry. One sonnet especially is worthy of the Greek Anthology in finish and charm of invention:

"*Benignant Sleep, that on soft pinion sped*
Dost wing through darkling night thy noiseless way,
And fleeting multitudes of dreams display
To weariness reposed on quiet bed:

Go where my Phillis doth her gentle head
And blooming cheek on peaceful pillow lay,
And while the body sleeps, the soul affray
With dismal shape from thy enchantment bred.
So like unto mine own that form be made,
Pallor so dim disfiguring its face,
That she may waken by compassion swayed.
If this thou wilt accomplish of thy grace,
A double wreath of poppies I will braid,
And silently upon thine altar place."

Parini, "a poor sickly priest," led an uneventful life in Milan until the overthrow of Austrian rule by the French invasion, when he came forward prominently in public affairs, and earned credit by his good sense and moderation. He died in 1799, aged seventy. He was a high-minded man of austere morality.

Another poet of the eighteenth century deserves no less fame than Parini, but has remained comparatively unknown from having written in dialect. It is his compensation to be as decidedly at the head of the Sicilian lyrists as Petrarch is at the head of the Tuscan; nor is Sicilian in any degree a rude or barbarous idiom. Schools of Sicilian poetry existed in the thirteenth, and again in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but all previous celebrities were eclipsed by the brilliant achievements of GIOVANNI MELI (1740–1815). Meli can hardly be paralleled either with Burns or with our English Theocritus, William Barnes, for he possesses neither Burns's tragic pathos and withering satire, nor Barnes's power of realistic description. But he rivals Burns in simplicity and melody, and is capable of much loftier lyric flights than Barnes; and if his satire does not brand or scathe, it smiles and sparkles with genial humour. The lightness, ease, and grace of his songs cannot be exceeded; his pastorals are

worthy of a countryman of Theocritus; and his mock-heroics, *Don Quixote*, and the *Origin of the World*, though evincing less of poetical inspiration, are effluences of genuine humour. His employment of the Sicilian dialect was highly favourable to his genius by exempting him from all obligation to write with academical constraint. It is most interesting to find Wordsworth's plea for a return to nature anticipated by a Sicilian of the generally stiff and affected eighteenth century. One of the most marked features of his poetry is its lively and dramatic character, arising from the close observation of national types, apparently just as they were observed by the ancient writers of Sicilian mimes, Sophron and Epicharmus. "As in antiquity," says Paul Heyse, "so at this day, idyll, song, and mime are the species of poetical composition allotted as the Sicilian heritage." Meli represented the national genius to perfection. His life was uneventful. He is represented as an amiable, sensible, unassuming man, as much of a Bacchus as consistent with sobriety, and as much of an Anacreon as comported with an utter ignorance of Greek, an *abate* of the old school, attached, but not in a perverse or bigoted manner, to the ancient social order, which, by the aid of British ships and troops, maintained itself better in Sicily than elsewhere in Italy.

The licentious poems of the Abate GIOVANNI BATTISTA CASTI (1721–1803) deserve attention from their influence on Byron's *Don Juan*, and also from the veiled political character of many of them. Casti, an accomplished traveller and acquainted with many distinguished men, belongs, like Talleyrand, both to the old time and to the new. Attached by habit and taste to the polished and frivolous society of the ancient régime, his sympathies

were nevertheless liberal. He satirised Catherine the Second, and when exiled from Vienna on that account, had the spirit to resign his Austrian pension. The *Animali Parlanti*, a satire upon the rule of the stronger in political life, and thus an interesting revival of the old conception of Reynard the Fox, is his best work.

It is remarkable that the age of Richardson and Fielding in England, and Marivaux and Prevost d'Exiles in France, should have produced no novelist of reputation in Italy. The imitation of even such world-famed books as the *Nouvelle Héloise* and *Werther* was reserved for a later generation. One romancer acquired some celebrity—Count ALESSANDRO VERRI (1741–1816), who hit upon, or borrowed from Wieland, the idea of resorting for his themes to antiquity. His *Notti Romane*, *Saffo*, and *Erostrato* are all works of merit, and the first-named was probably not without influence upon Landor.

On the whole, the history of the Italy of the eighteenth century is in most departments, intellectual and political, that of a patient recovering from a formidable malady by slow but certain stages. Much is lost, never to return. The relation of Italy to the rest of Europe is no longer that of Athens to Sparta or Bœotia, as in the sixteenth century; but neither, as in the seventeenth, is she estranged from the general current of European thought. Her intellectual position may be read in the very portraits of her eminent men, who in general display the placid eighteenth-century type, and might as well have been Frenchmen or Englishmen as Italians. They were writers of signal merit and utility, but, Vico excepted, not men of creative genius, and the national mind might

easily have degenerated into mediocrity but for the tremendous convulsions of the end of the century. In one province, however, she stood apart and supreme during nearly the whole of the age—the drama, with or without musical accompaniment, which must form the subject of our next chapter.

CHAPTER XXII

THE COMEDY OF MASKS—THE OPERA—DRAMA OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

THE eighteenth century, if chiefly remarkable in Italian literary history for the dawn of national regeneration, and the assimilation of literature to the type prevailing in other European countries, is also memorable as the period when Italian dramatists first acquired a European renown. This recognition may be considered to date from the production of Count Maffei's *Merope* in 1714, and from the summons of Apostolo Zeno to Vienna a few years afterwards. These two men represented, one, the classical tragedy, which, notwithstanding its conventional acceptance, has ever remained an exotic in Italy; the other, that special creation of Italian genius, the musical play or opera. Later in the century, Alfieri and Metastasio carried both forms nearer to perfection, and Goldoni gave his country a comedy at once brilliant and regular. Yet the genuine dramatic life of the nation is to be found in the *commedia dell' arte*, or Comedy of Masks, contemned by the learned, but dear to the people, which, except for a brief interval in the hands of Carlo Gozzi, failed to clothe itself with literary form, but has pervaded the theatres of Europe in the costume of harlequin, columbine, and pantaloon.

As the simplest, the *commedia dell' arte* is probably

the oldest form of the drama. There can be no question that the Greek rustics who smeared their faces with wine-lees at the Dionysiac festivals, and from whose improvised songs and gestures Greek comedy was developed, virtually enacted the same parts as the Tuscan and Neapolitan peasants, who, inheriting this rude entertainment from Roman times, preserved it through the Middle Ages, until it assumed new importance in the general awakening of the sixteenth century. The original wine-lees gave place to masks, and as masks cannot be varied *ad infinitum*, the characters became limited to a few well-defined and salient types. Hence every piece had substantially the same personages; although the Italian comedy allows of numerous variations upon its four stock parts. This caused the dialogue to be mainly extemporaneous; and as comedy is more easily extemporised than tragedy, the pieces tended more and more towards farce. At the same time, "the fertility of fancy, quickness of intelligence, facility of utterance, command of language, and presence of mind," indispensable to a good impromptu comedian, bestowed a certain regularity upon the performance. The actor was obliged to observe the conditions imposed by the character he represented, conventional as this was: if he enacted Pantaloon, he must not comport himself as Brighella or the Doctor, and *vice versâ*. As in the Indian drama, the comic passages were usually in dialect; the serious, if any, in cultivated language. Despised as literature, these pieces attained great popularity even beyond the limits of Italy, especially in Paris, where they divided public favour with the national theatre for a hundred and fifty years. As, however, they were mainly improvised, and no care was taken of such parts as might chance to be written down,

they have virtually perished. No literary relic of their palmy days seems to exist except the *scenarios* or skeleton plans of some of them, mere outlines to be filled up by the performers. Modern readers will hardly obtain a better idea of their spirit than from Vernon Lee's inimitable *Prince of the Hundred Soups*, a fantastic tale laid in the seventeenth century, the culminating period of these dramatic impromptus, towards the close of which they began to yield to the musical drama. Their capability of real dramatic excellence is revealed by two more recent developments—the improved Pulcinello farces of FRANCESCO CERLONE, a Neapolitan tailor, who, in the later half of the eighteenth century, "lifted," says Scherillo, "Pulcinello from the crowd of masks, and made him the monarch of the popular theatre"; and the fairy dramas of Carlo Gozzi, a Venetian of the same period. Both usually wrote their plays out, or at least left comparatively little to the invention of the actors; but Cerlone composed entirely in the spirit of the *commedia dell' arte*. His Pulcinello is commonly a butt, designed to keep the audience throughout in a roar of laughter by his ridiculous adventures, an object most fully attained. Gozzi's pieces are of higher literary quality, and demand a more particular notice.

CARLO GOZZI (1720–1808), brother of Gaspare Gozzi, already mentioned, would merit an honourable place among Italian writers merely on the strength of his entertaining memoirs, translated by Symonds. His real significance in literary history, however, is confined to the four brilliant years in which he carried all before him on the Venetian stage by his *fiabe* or dramatised fairy tales, composed in the spirit of the *commedia dell' arte*, in so far that many of the characters belonged to

the old conventional types, and that a portion of the action was highly farcical. These characteristics were nevertheless combined with a regular plot capable of exciting deep interest. The *fiabe* originated in a literary quarrel. Goldoni, the restorer of true comedy to Italy, had denounced the buffooneries of the old *commedia dell' arte*, and Gozzi, who had himself cultivated that form, and whose partiality for it was enhanced by a misunderstanding with Goldoni, determined to show its capabilities, and at the same time to ridicule his dramatic rivals, Goldoni and the Abate Chiari. To this end he hit upon the extremely happy idea of dramatising the fairy tales in Basile's *Pentamerone*, thus creating a form represented in English literature by the admirable burlesques of Planché, but with even more resemblance to an ancient form of which no complete example remains, the mythological parodies of the Attic Middle Comedy, which combined ridicule of the tragic poets with a regular plot derived from ancient tradition.

In the *scenario* of his *Three Oranges*, a play not preserved in its entirety, Gozzi has explained how he burlesqued his rivals, as, for instance, when the long journeys which Chiari's personages are supposed to perform within the compass of a single action are ridiculed by Tartaglia and Truffaldino being propelled two thousand leagues by the devil with a pair of bellows. ("They sprawled on the grass at the sudden cessation of the favouring gale.") The success of the *Three Oranges* was immense, and contributed to drive Goldoni from Venice. It was followed by a rapid succession of similar pieces, tending, however, to assume more of a literary character, and become more and more remote from the original type of the Comedy of Masks. This, if diminishing their value as

illustrations of popular manners and sentiment, renders them more generally enjoyable; and they would have a wide European reputation were they not principally composed in the Venetian dialect. *Turandot*, in the translation, or rather imitation, of Schiller, is known wherever German literature extends; but the scarcely inferior merits of the *Blue Monster*, the *Green Bird*, and the like, have not in general induced foreigners to learn the Venetian patois.

Gozzi, in truth, just missed greatness; he had the artistic talent to work out a clever idea, but not the poetical fancy requisite to elevate this to a region of ideal beauty. As suggested by Symonds, his pieces would supply excellent material for operatic libretti. Tieck subsequently undertook the task with higher qualifications, but the favourable moment had gone by. Gozzi's plays are the true offspring of the national spirit, Tieck's merely importations. After four years of brilliant triumphs, Gozzi stopped short, fearing to fatigue the public taste, or conscious of having exhausted his vein. The remainder of his career as a dramatic author was chiefly occupied with adaptations from the Spanish.

While in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth century the Comedy of Masks was decaying, a new form of drama was silently growing up, the operatic, "a thing," says Vernon Lee, "born of scenic displays and concerts, moulded into a romantic, wholly original shape, by the requirements of scenery, music, and singing." Its character as a literary production is indicated by the fact that its proper title of *melodrama* has become synonymous with something quite different, the prose tragedy which aims at strong sensational

situations, while *melodramatic* evokes no association with music.

The chief representatives of new literary forms are frequently heralded by precursors, who, if serving in some sense as foils to their genius, yet deprive them of the praise of absolute originality. What Phrynichus was to Æschylus, and Marlowe to Shakespeare, APOSTOLO ZENO (1668–1750), a Venetian of Candiote extraction, was to PIETRO METASTASIO. It was not Metastasio but Zeno who gave the musical drama literary rank, and proved that poets as well as musicians might make their reputations and their fortunes by it. Zeno produced his first serious attempt in musical drama in 1695, and long held the position of chief dramatic poet of Italy. After founding and for many years conducting the influential *Giornale de' Letterati*, he became court poet at Vienna in 1718, and eleven years afterwards retired voluntarily in favour of the rising Metastasio, who completely eclipsed him on the stage, but could not deprive him of the honour of having first taught Italy how dramatic poetry of a high order might be associated with music. Zeno, moreover, was no mere playwright, but a good lyrical poet with a strong dramatic instinct, a scholar, moreover, and antiquary, and a renowned collector of medals. His last years were spent in honour and comfort at his native Venice. Ere his life terminated in 1750 the productiveness of his successor had almost come to an end.

Metastasio's long prosperous life was not destitute of romance. The son (born 1698) of a petty Neapolitan druggist settled at Rome, he was adopted by the famous jurist and excellent dramatic critic Gravina, who had heard him singing in the street, for although at the

time an inglorious, he was fortunately not a mute Milton. Victor Cousin was similarly snatched from the gutter, for different issues and from different motives. His sonorous appellative was the gift of his patron, who Hellenised his protégé's original name of Trapassi, and left him a fortune. After wasting most of his benefactor's legacy, Metastasio articled himself to a Neapolitan lawyer named Castagnola, who received him on condition that he should not even read, much less write, a line of verse. This pledge was broken by the composition in 1722 of the *Gardens of the Hesperides*, a little mask composed under compulsion from the Austrian viceroy. The secret of the authorship was ferreted out by La Romanina, the celebrated *cantatrice*, who pounced upon Metastasio, bore him from Castagnola's house to her own, and made him a dramatic poet. She was a married woman much older than Metastasio, and there seems no suggestion that her affection was other than maternal. It ended, however, unhappily, perhaps tragically.

The immense success of his *Didone Abbandonata*, performed at Rome in 1723, and followed by a number of similar pieces, had made Metastasio the undisputed sovereign of the lyric stage, and in 1730 he was invited to Vienna to replace the veteran Zeno. He went. La Romanina wished to follow, but never did, and died very suddenly in 1734. Had Metastasio, now devoted to Countess Althan, to whom he is said to have been privately married, obstructed her journey? and was her death natural? There is nothing but surmise as to the precise nature of the case; but Vernon Lee's tragical summing-up is true as a statement of fact: "Thus ended the romance of Metastasio's life, and with it his

youth, and soon after his hope and his genius." His Vienna period between 1730 and 1740 was artistically the most brilliant of his life, but he wrote little afterwards; though his dramas long monopolised the Italian lyric stage; and the decline of his productive power seems to have been chiefly owing to the untoward interruption to dramatic performances occasioned by the Austrian war of succession in 1740 and following years. When peace returned, Metastasio had become nervous and hypochondriacal; he yet gained his culminating triumph with the *Atilio Regolo* in 1750, and the later half of his life, which ended in 1782, was embellished by his friendship with the Italian singer-statesman, Farinelli. Metastasio was selfish, but not cold-hearted; he pined for affection, but shrank from self-sacrifice; and his self-regarding instinct was not ennobled by devotion to any of the causes or pursuits which inspired Goethe. Yet he was a connoisseur in virtue, and his dramas represent her in some of her most attractive shapes. He saw forty editions of his works in his own library; he had not only accumulated but had refused distinctions; if he could feel free from blame towards La Romanina, there was nothing with which he needed to reproach himself. His life had been a continual triumph; no wonder if he had become weary of it at last.

Operatic success requires two endowments rarely united in the same person, the ingenuity of a playwright and the melody of a nightingale. Both these are combined in Metastasio; he is a very Scribe for briskness, deftness, and clever contrivance of plot; ere he had become nervous and depressed, his Neapolitan brain seethed at a dramatic situation; his *Achille in Sciro*, one

of the best of his pieces, was written, provided with music and scenery, and thoroughly organised for representation, within eighteen days. Other Italian librettists may have rivalled him in tunefulness or in the faculty of dramatic construction, none in both these respects, and none have been able to impart the like literary quality to their compositions; partly because he possessed and they lacked the indescribable something that makes the poet; partly because the sentiment which with them is merely theatrical, is with him sincere.

The general inferiority of operatic libretti has occasioned the musical drama to be despised as a branch of literature; although, to say nothing of the recent achievements of Richard Wagner, the Euripidean play, with its frequent predominance of solos over choral parts, approximated to the modern opera. It is no doubt true that the first requisite is that the words should be a vehicle for the music, and that, supposing this object attained, it is feasible to dispense with poetry. It follows that poetry usually is dispensed with, and that the only literary gift deemed absolutely indispensable for opera is that of dramatic construction. It is the great distinction of Metastasio to have been at the same time a consummate playwright and a true lyrical poet. Other great playwrights have been great poets in blank verse; but, at any rate for the first half of his life, Metastasio's bosom was as affluent a storehouse of melody as Rückert's; to sing was for him as easy as to speak. He was constrained to submit himself to the laws of the opera, inexorable because founded upon the reason of things. As an opera can be nothing without a *cantatrice*, it follows that it must turn chiefly upon the passion of love; as the principal performers' throats will not bear

a perpetual strain, they must necessarily be sometimes relieved by inferior executants; hence the necessity of an underplot, and of constructive ability to interweave this with the main action. As the musical drama is not, after all, natural, the audience's attention must be kept occupied by continual action and bustle; as the singer must leave the stage at his best, the recitative must be followed by an air. Such tags must be judged simply with reference to the musical effect, which with Metastasio was always very great. On the whole, few writers have adapted means to ends more successfully than he has done, or have more completely solved the problem of investing the amusement of the moment with abiding literary worth.

The most celebrated of Metastasio's lyrical dramas are perhaps the *Olimpiade*, the *Achille in Sciro*, the *Clemenza di Tito*, and the *Atilio Regolo*. The *Artaserse*, the *Temistocle*, the *Zenobia*, have also a high reputation, and in truth the intervals of merit among his pieces are not very wide. The operatic dramatist is released from many of the obligations which press most heavily upon the tragic or comic poet; he is at liberty to mingle the manners and ideas of different ages and nations as much as he pleases; no great profundity of psychological analysis can be expected from him, for if he possessed this gift the conditions of his field of art would debar him from manifesting it. It is enough if his subject is interesting, his action lively and well combined, and his melody copious and spontaneous. Metastasio selected his themes with consummate judgment, and showed a Scribe-like power of devising bustling action and sudden surprises, while his tunefulness is remarkable even for an Italian poet. His pieces would

have enthralled audiences even without literary charm. That they retain their place in the library after their disappearance from the stage proves him a poet as well as a dramatist. His oratorios resemble his secular pieces, but are less interesting. His cantatas have the air of loppings from his dramas. The chief merit of his other lyrical compositions is their inexhaustible melody.

The vogue of the lyrical drama under Zeno and Metastasio was not favourable to the more legitimate forms of the art. "*Ce beau monstre*," said Voltaire, "*étouffe Melpomène*." If so, the Italian drama was stifled, like Desdemona, in her sleep. The extravagance of the first half of the seventeenth century had been succeeded by the torpor of the second, and nothing really good had been produced in either. It was not until 1713 that a tragedy appeared which deserved and obtained a European reputation. This was the *Merope* of Count Scipione Maffei, whose principal work, his *Verona Illustrata*, has already been mentioned, and who, besides many other claims to distinction, gained an honourable fame as a natural philosopher, as the critical historian of chivalric orders, and as the denouncer of duelling. A man of this stamp, however gifted, was not likely to be richly endowed with the poetical temperament, and Maffei's *Merope* shares the almost universal fault of modern tragedies on classical subjects, it is essentially a work of reflection. It was composed with the deliberate purpose of retrieving the Italian drama from its degraded condition, and was the result of conversations with the actor Riccoboni, author of an esteemed work on the Italian stage, who lamented that the theatre of his own country afforded him no

fine parts. The want was well supplied by *Merope*, the plot being highly dramatic, and the treatment, in the opinion of Matthew Arnold, more poetical than that of either of Maffei's successors, Voltaire and Alfieri.

Maffei nevertheless was to yield to one of the most extraordinary men that Italy ever produced, one brought up under so many disadvantages that it might seem impossible that he should occupy a high place in the literature of his country, and who nevertheless, by the mere force of will and character, has fought his way to almost the highest in his own field. It must be added that although Count VITTORIO ALFIERI (1749–1803) might probably have been eminent as an historian or a political writer, tragedy and satire were the only departments of poetry in which it seems possible that he should have excelled. This is as much as to say that he was by nature little of a poet. He was also little of an Italian, being by birth a Piedmontese, a people whom the Italians of that day regarded, from an ethnographical point of view, much as the Greeks of Philip's day regarded the Macedonians, and who were in truth destined to work out the parallel by subduing the rest of the peninsula, though with very different aims and to very different results. Alfieri was indeed more like an Englishman than an Italian, and might well have sat as a model to some delineator of the haughty, eccentric, whimsical, misanthropic, hopelessly perverse, but on occasion extravagantly generous being who is still accepted on the Continent as the embodiment of British national character. He did, in fact, belong to a type more common in England than elsewhere, the patrician republican of the mould of Algernon Sidney or Savage Landor, animated by an unaffected passion for liberty,

and yet arrogant, exacting, domineering; fired by a disinterested love of man, and always quarrelling with men.

Alfieri fortunately felt moved to write his *Autobiography*, a work of intense interest, and perhaps the most thoroughly sincere among celebrated books of its order of literature. It depicts a man continually under the influence of pride and discontent, but whom pride and discontent stimulate to lofty endeavour and noble actions. Vivid indeed is the picture of his self-contempt for his wasted youth and his ignorance of his own language, the speech of Piedmont being then the worst of all provincial jargons. Most interesting is the detail of his self-education, both in purity of diction and in the dramatic art. This psychological interest is relieved and enhanced by the detail of his numerous adventures, his extensive travels, and his love affairs, three of which were memorable. In London, in 1772, he fought, by the last rays of the setting sun, unattended by seconds, a duel with the injured husband of Lady Ligonier, and wounded in the right arm, was immediately afterwards back in the theatre out of which he had been summoned to the fray. His Milan adventure, if less romantic, was more whimsical: convinced of the unworthiness of his siren, he imitated Ulysses by compelling his servant to bind him to his chair until the craving for her company had passed away.

Alfieri's third escapade of the kind is world-famous, his rescue of Louise von Stolberg, Countess of Albany, from the drunken husband who habitually maltreated her, and who, one blushes to record, was no other than Charles Edward Stuart, the chivalrous and adventurous Young Pretender of a former generation. Alfieri's

attachment to the Countess was undoubtedly deep and permanent, and although she seems to have forgotten him after his death, she felt for him when he was the only resource she had in the world. The intimacy might long have remained Platonic but for the extreme brutality of Charles Edward, which compelled the Countess to escape by Alfieri's contrivance to a convent where she saw neither her husband nor her lover. After a while the Cardinal of York, the Pretender's brother, offered her an asylum in a Roman palace, where her acquaintance with Alfieri became more intimate. Afterwards, legally separated by the interposition of the King of Sweden, she withdrew to Alsace, where Alfieri followed her. They eventually established themselves in Paris, and the death of Charles Edward made no change in their existence. Louise, though apparently not a warm-hearted, was a highly intellectual woman; half French, half German, she possessed a range of knowledge and accomplishment which Alfieri could hardly have found in any Italian woman at that date, and her sympathy, without doubt, contributed greatly to the development of his genius. Driven from France by the storms of the Revolution, which he had at first hailed with a warmth which he afterwards repented, Alfieri settled with his mistress at Florence. There he wrote the *Misogallo*, a furious denunciation of France, and exhausted by hard study and an ascetic life, died in October 1803, as, with an unconscious touch of irony, he was compelling himself to write comedies. There seems no ground for believing that he was privately married to the Countess, who honoured him with a monument beautifully sculptured by Canova. If, however, the mourning figure by the tomb represents the bereaved one, she has taken the

lion's share, Alfieri appearing merely as a medallion head in profile. Room should have been found for a bust at least, for whimsical, saturnine, arrogant as he was, he possessed not only a head but a heart. Scornful of superstition, he was endowed with deep religious feeling, and the defects of his harsh, angular character were at all events remote from those national failings which had chiefly contributed to the ruin of Italy.

It is remarkable indeed that a Piedmontese, who had to teach himself classical Italian with infinite labour, and whose character possessed few distinctively national traits, should have been the reviver of the national spirit in Italy. This Alfieri unquestionably was. He had what is so deplorably wanting among the gifted men of the golden age of Italian literature, a passion for freedom and a hatred of tyranny, which impart to his works, however remote in subject from modern times, the air of indignant protests against the subjection and degradation of his country. This feeling, as well as the haughty and self-sufficing independence of his character, brings him very near to the stoical Romans of the age of Nero, whose literary productions he approaches by his declamatory eloquence, his defective feeling for nature, and the generally studied and laboured character of his poetry. Had Seneca possessed the leading requisites of a tragic poet, he would have been a kind of Roman Alfieri. Comparing Alfieri's tragedy with the modern form of the art which owes most to Seneca, the French drama of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we are sensible of a great advance; not that Alfieri is comparable as a poet or a stylist to Corneille or Racine, but that his dramatic economy is improved by the suppression of much conventional machinery, and the

subordination of amorous gallantry to more dignified and serious emotion.

The strongest family likeness prevails among Alfieri's tragedies. "He is," says Arnold, "a noble-minded, deeply-interesting man, but a monotonous poet." The quality of "narrow elevation" which Arnold finds in Alfieri is indeed most apparent throughout all his plays; but they are not, like so many productions of the classical school, tame and frigid from pedantic over-correctness, nor are they untrue to nature through servile adherence to tradition and convention. Their dignity and nobility of feeling inspire deep respect; the author is evidently akin to the heroes he depicts, and in their place would have been capable of their actions. His genius did not lead him to the imitation of the Greeks; his plays are rather such as a Roman poet might have produced if he could have more completely emancipated himself from Greek models. He aimed at nervous conciseness, and attained it. The eloquence which he acquired by a Demosthenic severity of study may be fitter for the forum than the stage, but rarely degenerates into mere rhetoric. His theme is always some grand action derived from history or mythology. His predilection is rather for the heroes of liberty, like Timoleon or the Brutuses. *Saul*, however, is probably his most successful play upon the whole, though *Myrrha* may produce the greatest effect when an actress can be found competent for so exceptional a part. *Philip the Second* inspired Schiller's *Don Carlos*. *Antigone*, *Orestes*, and the *Conspiracy of the Pazzi* may also be named among Alfieri's most successful pieces.

Alfieri's prose-writings possess no great value, except the *Autobiography*, which is invaluable alike from the interest of the character depicted and of the events narrated,

and from its transparent candour. As a rule, the only quite trustworthy autobiographic delineations are the unconscious ones. Pepys has undoubtedly portrayed himself just as he was, but it is equally certain that he had no intention of doing so. Alfieri may or may not have depicted himself as he was, although the portrait is perfectly in harmony with the impression derived from his writings. But he has unquestionably depicted himself as he appeared to himself, and more could not be expected. Alfieri's minor poems display the "narrow elevation" ascribed by Matthew Arnold to his tragedies. He has little music, fancy, or variety, but expresses strong feeling with unusual energy, especially when moved to wrath:

> "*Was Angelo born here? and he who wove*
> *Love's charm with sorcery of Tuscan tongue*
> *Indissolubly blent? and he whose song*
> *Laid bare the world below to world above?*
> *And he who from his lowly valley clove*
> *The azure height and trod the stars among?*
> *And he whose searching mind the monarch's wrong*
> *Fount of the people's misery did prove?*
> *Yea, these had birth when men might uncontrolled*
> *Speak, read, write, reason with impunity;*
> *Not from the chair was cowardice extolled;*
> *Not for free thinking would indictment lie;*
> *Nor did the city in her Book of Gold*
> *Inscribe the name and office of the spy.*"

If Alfieri was a manifest child of Melpomene, the third great dramatic writer of the age bore the impress of Thalia with no less distinctness. CARLO GOLDONI'S memoirs paint with the utmost liveliness the born comedian, careless, light-hearted, proof by a happy temperament against all strokes of Fate, yet thoroughly respectable

and honourable. Such characters abound in Italy, and wonderful it is that only one member of so observant and lively a race should have won an European reputation as a comic author. Tragedy has in some measure flourished since the death of Alfieri, but Goldoni still stands alone. The absence of any predecessor is explicable from the circumstances enumerated at the beginning of this chapter: the national style of comedy was not literary, and no literary reputation could be built upon or out of it; while those who followed a different path produced simply academic work devoid of all vitality. Goldoni broke the spell, and gave Italy a classical form of comedy, which has not indeed remained uncultivated, but has never since his time been cultivated by a master. He was born at Venice in 1707, and was the son of a physician. His dramatic tastes were inherited from his grandfather, a Modenese, and all the endeavours of his parents to direct his activity into other channels came to nothing. He was indeed educated for a lawyer, graduated, held at different times a secretaryship and a councillorship, seemed to have settled steadily down to the practice of law, when an unexpected invitation carried him off to Venice, and for years he did nothing but manage theatres and write plays, directing all his energies to supersede the national Comedy of Masks, and comedies of intrigue dependent upon intricacy of plot, by representations of actual life and [illegible]. Many of his best plays were written in the Venetian dialect. At length (1761) umbrage, as was thought, at the vogue of Gozzi's fairy dramas induced Goldoni to accept a royal invitation to Paris, where he lived the remainder of his life composing plays in French and writing his memoirs in the same language.

He survived the downfall of the monarchy, and died in 1793, just as the pension of which he had been deprived was about to be restored to him. The first half of his life had been full of vicissitudes and entertaining adventures, agreeably recounted in his memoirs.

The future master of comedy commenced his dramatic career with a melodrama, *Amalasunta*, which he burned, and followed this up with another, of whose success he afterwards professed himself ashamed. He was not long, nevertheless, in discovering his proper vocation; he inwardly, and from his point of view rightly—for he could never have been a Gozzi—declared war against the popular Comedy of Masks, and when a piece of his succeeded, whispered to himself, "Good, but not yet Molière." The great Frenchman was the object of his idolatry, and justly, for not only was Molière the true monarch of the comic stage, but his period was neither too near nor too remote, and his world neither too like nor unlike Goldoni's, for successful imitation. By 1753 Goldoni's apprenticeship was over, and none but literary enemies contested his title of the Italian Molière, a title confirmed by the suffrage of posterity. *Un Curioso Accidente*, *Il Vero Amico*, *La Bottega del Caffè*, *La Locandiera*, and many other comedies that might be named, while true to the manners of a past age, retain all their freshness in our own. Italian audiences yet take delight in his pictures of their ancestors. "One of the best theatres in Venice," says Symonds, "is called by his name. His house is pointed out by gondoliers to tourists. His statue stands almost within sight of the Rialto. His comedies are repeatedly given by companies of celebrated actors." Yet as Cæsar called Terence a halved Menander, so we may term Goldoni a halved

Molière. The Menandrine element in Molière is present with him; the Aristophanic is missing. Goldoni wants the French writer's overpowering *vis comica*, and is happier in "catching the manners living as they rise" than in laying bare the depths of the heart. Wit, gaiety, elegance, simplicity, truth to nature, skill in dramatic construction, render him nevertheless a most delightful writer, and his fame is the more assured from his position as his country's sole eminent representative in the region of polite comedy.

The eighteenth century had thus endowed Italy with dramatic poets of European reputation, worthy to be inscribed on the same roll as Racine and Molière. All the varied dramatic activity of the Cinque Cento, Machiavelli's *Mandragola* and the two great pastoral dramas excepted, belonging essentially to a lower sphere, fails to counterweigh the masterpieces of Alfieri and Goldoni. Even their achievement, nevertheless, did not amount to the creation of a national drama. If tragedy and comedy can be said to have taken root at all, the latter degenerated, while the former put forth only sparse and occasional flowers. Alfieri's best plays continue stock-pieces to this extent, that they are revived as offering the most suitable opportunities for the display of the brilliant histrionic genius which from time to time irradiates the Italian stage. A succession of gifted men —Monti, Foscolo, Manzoni, Pellico, Niccolini, Cossa— have continued the tradition, and on the whole the state of tragedy seems much the same in Italy as in England. Comedy, on the other hand, notwithstanding some encouraging signs of revival, is far from vigorous, and the melodrama which occupies the stage is devoid of literary pretensions. Under these discouraging circumstances it

is not perhaps very extraordinary, though assuredly it is very amusing, that the Italian *literati* of the present day, as reported by their interviewer-general, Signor Ojetti, should gravely pronounce the drama which they cannot write a rudimentary and superannuated form of art in comparison with the novel which they can—*ein ueberwundener Standpunkt*, as would be said in Germany. The idea of modern romancers transcending the art of Shakespeare and Sophocles is delightful from its modesty; but it must be evident that the short story alone can rival the artistic finish of a perfect drama, for every romance on a large scale must necessarily be eked out by descriptions, reflections, and episodes unessential to the main action.

The cause of the failure of the drama to establish itself in the land of opera is certainly not to be found in any preference on the part of the public for the tedious psychological analysis of the modern school of fiction over the rapidity and variety of the stage, but rather in some deep-seated trait of the national character. This is most probably the prevailing sensuousness of the people—a term not here used in any disparaging sense, but as expressing the national preference for the eye to the ear. *Segnius irritant*, as an ancient Italian has it. The shows of the *Rappresentazioni* were undoubtedly more attractive to the Florentine public than the verses which expounded them; and we have seen that magnificent scenic equipments were needed to bring the people to share the dramatic amusements of the courts of the sixteenth century. This tendency would probably be found to be inveterate, and to date from the period when the Atellan farces of Latium prefigured the *Commedia dell' Arte*. It was not mere love of bloodshed that

made gladiatorial shows popular at Rome. Professor Mahaffy remarks that while the refinement of Terence's translations from the Greek in comparison with Plautus attests the improvement of the taste of the Roman aristocracy, "this brilliant success was not popular with the masses, and led to no further attempts in the same direction."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE REVIVAL

WE have seen that the Italy of the eighteenth century had fully entered into the general intellectual movement of the rest of Europe. Scarcely any trace remained of the special characteristics of the Cinque Cento except the imperishable tradition of culture and refinement which still kept literature at a high level of style. The vagaries of the seventeenth century had passed without leaving a trace. The prevailing taste was that of France. The chief exception to this polished uniformity was found in the drama. On the lyrical stage, Italy, favoured by the musical capabilities of her language and the superior aptitudes of her vocalists, had created something really novel and national; and in the allied realm of instrumental music had emulated the architectural and pictorial triumphs of the sixteenth century. In tragedy and comedy, moreover, she had at length attained to a semblance of a national drama; but this, being the achievement of two exceptionally gifted men, who in comedy at all events left no worthy successors, was comparatively apart from the national life, and could not be expected to prove an important element in the literary development of the future.

What Italy was at that time as regards originality, she has continued to be until our own day. While claiming

her full share in the conquests of science, and by no means behind-hand in the study of antiquity, she has produced little that can be regarded as an absolute creation. Leopardi, alike in genius and art the most consummate among her men of letters, has wrought on old lines, exalting the forms he found to more eminent perfection. Manzoni's innovations are chiefly introduced from beyond the Alps. Carducci has rendered a priceless service in repressing the language's tendency to fluent inanity, and has widely expanded its metrical capabilities, but has mainly worked upon hints derived from antique or foreign literatures. If, however, Italy has originated none of the great movements which have transformed European literature since the middle of the eighteenth century, she has participated in them all. As she then fully associated herself with the enlightened and humanising tendencies of that beneficent if prosaic age; she has since entered freely into the four great movements which have broken up eighteenth-century formality and bought life and liberty at the price of intellectual disorder—the naturalistic, the sentimental, the romantic, and the revolutionary.

The naturalistic impulse to the living and accurate description of natural beauty, and the recognition of a living spirit in Nature, is no modern phenomenon. It is present as a vivifying influence in the classics and in the poetry of Palestine and the East, and even more so in Celtic literature, where more than anywhere else it appears spontaneous and exempt from literary manipulation. Whether from a Celtic admixture of race or from some other reason, it seems among modern literatures the more especial property of the British. The descriptions of Shakespeare and Milton, like those of their

Greek predecessors, may have been surpassed in the minute elaboration of detail, not in truth or feeling. Spenser affords a still better example, for—the multitudinous melodies of his peculiar stanza excepted—this is the one point in which he transcends his Italian models. In propriety of plan, in human and dramatic interest, in terseness and polish of style, he is greatly their inferior; but the natural descriptions of Ariosto and Tasso, beautiful as they often are, fall far behind his in rich warmth and glowing splendour.

This national gift fell into abeyance in the later half of the seventeenth century: there is scarcely a vestige of it in Dryden except where he reproduces Chaucer. Thomson's *Seasons* mark its revival, and were not without their effect in Europe; yet it must be owned that its modern herald and hierophant is not a Briton, but a Swiss justly reckoned among French authors—Jean Jacques Rousseau. It was the mission of this extraordinary man to inaugurate not merely the naturalistic, but the sentimental movement also, which, taken up by Sterne and Goethe, filled Europe with imitators, and, among other consequences, gave a great impulse to the novel at the expense of the drama. Neither the description of nature nor the analysis of feeling is peculiarly congenial to the Italian character, and it may be doubted whether the latter impulse would have been very deeply felt but for the unhappy political circumstances of the country, which engendered among the noblest minds a prevailing disgust and despair conducive to the diffusion of morbid sentiment and a generally mournful cast of thought. Both the naturalistic and the sentimental tendencies inaugurated by Rousseau found a powerful representative in Ugo Foscolo.

The next great development of taste by which Italian literature came to be modified was one with which the Italian temperament has naturally so little sympathy, that the influence which it exercised and continues to exercise must be regarded as a strong proof of the susceptibility of Italy to all great currents affecting intellectual Europe. The romantic school is at variance with all her literary traditions and all her canons of taste. Had it been anything but an exotic, it would have come into being centuries before among a people rich in popular legends, and whose history abounds with subjects adapted for ballad poetry. Little, however, is seen or heard of it until, as the cosmopolitan drift becomes more and more powerful, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Scott excite the curiosity of the Italian reading public. One reason for this backwardness may be plausibly alleged in the absence of Gothic architecture from Italy. The earliest architectural remains were either classical or Byzantine, which passed so easily into the Palladian and other modern Italian styles as to render Gothic architecture in Italy little more than an episode, and to leave no room for those impressions of vague sublimity and solemn grandeur which Gothic architecture produces, and which so naturally spring up in the minds of the inhabitants of countries covered like England and Germany with ruined castles and abbeys. Every feeling which the artist of the romantic school would address is aroused by the mossed keeps and mouldering fanes of mediæval antiquity. Horace Walpole may have been a dilettante in architecture as in literature; nevertheless the romantic school in England is inaugurated by Strawberry Hill and the *Castle of Otranto;* and Goethe's residence at Strasburg had much to do with *Goetz von Berlichingen.* When, on

the other hand, the Northern man is initiated into the beauties of Italian architecture, his romantic feeling is apt to wane, as he himself admits :

> "'*Tis not for centuries four for nought*
> *Our European world of thought*
> *Hath made familiar to its home*
> *The classic mind of Greece and Rome;*
> *In all new work that would look forth*
> *To more than antiquarian worth,*
> *Palladio's pediments and bases,*
> *Or something such, will find their places:*
> *Maturer optics don't delight*
> *In childish dim religious light,*
> *In evanescent vague effects*
> *That shirk, not face, one's intellects;*
> *They love not fancies just betrayed,*
> *And artful tricks of light and shade,*
> *But pure form nakedly displayed,*
> *And all things absolutely made.*"

The feeling thus expressed by Clough, speaking through the mouth of the Devil, is utterly contrary to the mystic awe and vague apprehension of infinity characteristic of romantic art. It is no wonder, therefore, that the movement engendered towards the middle of the eighteenth century by impatience with the prosaic present and reaction towards the neglected Middle Age, favoured by the moral atmosphere created by Rousseau, and for England and Germany so imperious a necessity that Wordsworth, Scott, Coleridge, Novalis and Tieck, all romanticists from the cradle, appeared in the world within three years, should have been little heard of in Italy until Scott and Goethe had captivated the youthful genius of Manzoni. Yet a streak of romantic light had preceded, though from quite a different quarter, namely,

Ossian. If the Gaelic bard's antiquity was questionable, he was not the less acceptable to a modern imagination; and the prodigious success in all European nations of what would have been universally derided thirty years sooner, showed that new tastes and new cravings had been awakened among them. Of these Italy had her share, as attested, towards the end of the eighteenth century, by the vogue of the translation of Ossian by Cesarotti.

Not much need be said in this place of the last great factor in the literary metamorphosis to which Italy, in common with the rest of Europe, had to conform herself. The Revolution modified literature by altering the environment of men of letters, supplying them with themes and ideas which could not otherwise have come within their scope, and inspiring them with vehement passions according as their circumstances and temperaments led them to champion the new gospel or rally to the ancient traditions. Italy was one of the last countries to feel its effects in the literary sphere, chiefly because the movement did not, as elsewhere, originate in the land itself, but was thrust upon it by an invader whose rapine alienated much of the patriotic sentiment that would otherwise have welcomed the Revolution. Monti, the first great Italian writer whose career was powerfully affected by it, was neither a revolutionist nor an anti-revolutionist, but a straw in a whirlpool. When, however, the idea of Italian unity—Napoleon's legacy to his true native country—had had time to develop itself, and it had become manifest that the only path to it lay through a cordial adoption of revolutionary principles, the Revolution acquired more practical significance for Italy than for any other country in Europe.

In a certain respect, Alfieri may be considered as the

first representative of both the sentimental and the national tendencies in modern Italian literature. He had denounced tyranny and extolled liberty while the Bastille had yet many years to stand; and if he could not write like Goethe or Rousseau, he had practically lived, and recorded in his autobiography, a life of sentimental passion. The air of the Revolution, nevertheless, was needed to bring these germs to maturity. Its stimulating influence is especially conspicuous in the tone of Madame de Staël's *Corinne*, compared with that of the letters of Goethe and Beckford. The landscape is the same, but is beheld in quite another light. Thus encouraged by general European sympathy, the revolutionary and sentimental movements overpower the pliable Monti, and find a genuine representative in the moody and malcontent Foscolo. The romantic movement, which Italy would hardly have originated for herself, necessarily came later, and found its leader in Manzoni. Silvio Pellico and others acceded, and connected these currents of feeling with the more decided revolutionary impulse of a later generation, typified in Leopardi, Giusti, and Mazzini.

VINCENZO MONTI (1754–1828) is indeed no representative of the Revolution, for the most celebrated of his poems is a denunciation of it, and although he afterwards changed sides, the Republic was for him merely a transition to the Empire. He nevertheless in a measure personifies Italy herself amid the gusts of the revolutionary tempest, tossed to and fro between contending influences, her sails spread to the sky, her anchor still cleaving to earth. Born in the district of Ferrara, and having gone through the ordeal, so often exacted from poets, of distasteful law-study, he repaired to Rome as

a literary adventurer, and by his splendid tercets on the Beauty of Nature and other lyrics adapted for recitation, sang himself into the good graces of the Papal court. He took a yet higher flight in his fine, rather lyrical than dramatic, tragedy of *Aristodemo* (1787), as superior to Alfieri in versification as inferior in virile energy. The subject is one of the most pathetic, the grief of a father for having slain his daughter. The *Galeotto Manfredi* (1788), partly inspired by private circumstances, is interesting as one of the first Italian examples of romantic tragedy. One of the characters is copied from Iago.

It was not until 1793 that Monti took rank as the first epic poet of his time by his *Bassvilliana*, a poem on the murder of the French diplomatist Bassville, who had perished in a tumult provoked by his own imprudence. Never since the tentmaker of Tarsus was caught up into the third heaven was an obscure person elevated so mightily as this insignificant Bassville, of whose remorseful spirit Monti's ardent imagination makes a new Dante, guided by an angel to behold the atrocities of the French Revolution as a penance preliminary to its entrance into Paradise. In the whole compass of literature there is perhaps no other instance of so close and successful a copy as Monti's of Dante, combined with so much impetuous vigour, and other qualities not usually associated with imitation. It revealed Monti as the most impressionable of poets in his equal subjugation by Dantesque influences and by the passions of the hour. Such a man must needs move with the times. Ere long the Papal courtier was the friend and guest of the French generals, inditing thundering odes against superstition and fanaticism; soon he held office under the Cisalpine Republic, and

when the Austrians prevailed he fled to Paris. He came back as the courtier and flatterer of Napoleon; and yet this versatility seems less the effect of self-interest than of ductility of character, and his countrymen laughingly talked of the three periods of the *abate*, the *citizen*, and the *cavalier* Monti. This sensitiveness was serviceable to his lyric genius, for he thrilled with the emotion he wished to express, and in expressing it approved himself a perfect master of language and metre.

In the interval between Monti's withdrawal from Rome and the brilliant position which under the Imperial auspices he acquired at Milan, he had produced his *Prometheus*, one of the finest examples of Italian blank verse, but a curious mixture of things ancient and modern; his *Musologia*, charming octaves on the Muses; *Caius Gracchus*, a tragedy betraying imitation of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, celebrated for the force of the fifth act; *Mascheroniana*, a palinode for the *Bassvilliana*, notwithstanding the art with which the poet manages to assert his consistency. Disfigured as it is by adulation of Napoleon and senseless abuse of England,[1] this is perhaps Monti's finest poem. It is the offspring of a genuine poetic *æstrum*, which whirls the stuff of a party pamphlet into sublimity, like a rag in a hurricane. It was never finished. Incomplete too is the *Bard of the Black Forest*, a poem on Napoleon's exploits, unequal to the subject, but remarkable for its concise rapidity of expression. Monti was now Napoleon's official laureate for the Italian department, and it is sufficiently amusing to find him expressing his apprehensions lest he should be so far carried away by his

[1] "*Impatient to put out the only light*
Of Liberty that yet remains on Earth!"—WORDSWORTH.

patriotism as to offend the reigning powers, and breathing a superfluous prayer for prudence in his vocation. There was little danger; patriotism, though a genuine, was a weaker emotion with him than respect for dignities, as he sufficiently evinced by his obedience to the Austrian mandate to celebrate the expulsion of the French, although he never abased himself so far as to assail Napoleon. He lost his office of historiographer, and retiring into private life, devoted himself mainly to critical and philological work. He had a short time previously published a translation of the *Iliad*, commenced in 1790, highly admired by his countrymen, and certainly a remarkable performance when it is considered that he scarcely knew a word of Greek; whence Foscolo wittily called him *gran traduttor dei traduttor d'Omero*. So much more important to the translator is flexibility of mind than exactness of scholarship. Monti's later days, now embittered by controversies and pecuniary embarrassments, mitigated by the generosity of friends, now brightened by successful work on his unfinished *Feronia*, a youthful production in which he had celebrated the draining of the Pontine marshes, or by the production of some fine lyric, passed on the whole tranquilly until his death in 1828 from the effects of a paralytic stroke.

The eloquent but unspeculative Monti had nothing to teach but his almost inimitable art of verbal expression, and hence has founded no school. His reputation has declined, chiefly from the ephemeral character of the themes on which his genius was expended, and of which none but himself could have made so much. He can hardly be called a great poet, if for no other reason than that his impressionable imagination wanted tenacity; he tired of his own works, and left the majority of them incomplete.

He is nevertheless a brilliant phenomenon, the more interesting from the decidedly national stamp of his genius. He has Southern demonstrativeness and volubility, and kindles like a meteor by his own flight; when thoroughly fired, whether in epic or lyric, he is almost an improvisatore. Improvisation in an English poet would seem a *tour de force* at best, but it appears natural to the quick intelligence and musical speech of Italy.

Monti is thus a representative of his nation, and is no less true to the general spirit of his epoch: classic in aspiration, modern in sentiment, related to the Greeks much as Canova was related to Phidias. He was no interpreter of his age, but a faithful mirror of its successive phases, and endowed with the rare gift of sublimity to a degree scarcely equalled by any contemporary except Goethe, Byron, and Shelley. The descriptions in the *Mascheroneide* of Napoleon's descent upon Italy, and of the inundation of the Po, if not perfect models of taste, are almost Lucretian in their stormy and tumultuous grandeur. The frequent poverty, or at least shallowness of his thought is veiled by splendid diction; and in tact and felicity of encomium he recalls Dryden, whom he so strongly resembles in the character of many of his compositions, the versatility of his conduct, and the circumstances of his life. A further analogy may be found in the eminence of both as critics, Monti's disquisitions on Dante and the Cruscan vocabulary constituting as important a portion of his work as Dryden's prefaces of his. His dialogues, chiefly between deceased authors and grammarians recalled from the shades to discuss philological questions, are charming for their elegance and grace.

UGO FOSCOLO (1778–1827), the second eminent poet of

the revolutionary period, successively Monti's champion and his adversary, is in most respects a violent contrast to him. It would have been well had he been merely his complement. Monti's pliant character greatly needed an infusion of vigour and independence; but Foscolo, though a self-restrained artist in his poems, in his life required the curb as much as Monti required the spur. Worse, his tempestuous vehemence and crabbed indocility were no tokens of real strength; he was at bottom weak and whimsical, the slave of passion, physical and intellectual. His countrymen, nevertheless, have forgotten his faults and follies for the sake of his untarnished patriotism, most unjustly suspected in his own day; he is the first very distinguished modern Italian whose consistency in this particular is a source of national joy and pride. Alfieri's resentment against the French, though sufficiently excusable, blinded him to the real tendency of his times; other well-meaning men were either too intimately associated with the temporary makeshift of the despotic Empire, or too amenable to clerical pressure. Foscolo was untainted by either influence, and might be deemed not only absolved but canonised by his countrymen when Garibaldi made a pilgrimage to his tomb at Chiswick, and when, in 1871, his remains were transferred to the cemetery at Florence, the inspiration of the most famous of his poems.

Alike in personal character and the quality of his productions, Foscolo may be compared with Landor, but with the capital distinction that Landor was a man of the past, and Foscolo, for all his Greek erudition and classical enthusiasm, a man of his own time. His romance, *Jacopo Ortis* (1798), perhaps the most celebrated of his productions, is a reminiscence of *Werther* and a fore-

runner of *René*, but adds to the merely personal sorrows of these tragic autobiographies the nobler motive of despair at the ruin and enslavement of the hero's country. Foscolo, though born at Zante, was prouder of his Venetian descent than of his Greek nativity, and the ignominious end of so glorious a history as the Republic's not unnaturally or ignobly drove him to despair. At the same time he was usually under the spell of some woman; one of his genuine letters, indeed, written at a much later date, surpasses his romance in the eloquence of unhappy passion. Both motives combine to drive Ortis to suicide. Apart from its impressive style, the book is weak and unwholesome, but it powerfully depicts an unquestionable tendency of the age, and as such has a right to live, apart from its influence on Leopardi, George Sand, and other more recent writers of genius. Foscolo's melancholy, fretful and egotistic as it is, is not pessimism; it is not grounded in the nature of things, but is always remediable by a change in external circumstances.

Unlike the exuberant Monti, Foscolo wrote little poetry, but his scanty production is of choice quality. His most celebrated poem is the *Sepolcri* (1807), which in style and subject bears a remarkable resemblance to the finest poem America has yet given to the world, Bryant's *Thanatopsis*. The American poet has conceived his work in a larger and grander spirit, and consequently surpasses Foscolo in the sublimity of his thought, though the latter's poem is longer and adorned with episodes, and in merit of execution there may be little to choose. Bryant dwells on the majesty of death; Foscolo on the reverence due to the tomb, and the immortality of the memories of the great—a fine theme undoubtedly, and deserving of the monumental eloquence with which he

has adorned it, but small if measured against Bryant's. Foscolo's other most considerable poetical composition, his *Hymns to the Graces*, celebrated as the beneficent spirits of Greece, Italy, and an ideal world, was long but an aggregation of fragments, and was recovered as a whole only in 1856. The fastidious author could never satisfy himself, and the result is a production more remarkable for high polish than warmth of poetic feeling. It is just such a poem as Landor might have written. Foscolo's tragedies, *Ajax* and *Ricciarda*, are fine compositions in the spirit of Alfieri: the former, notwithstanding its classical theme, has a relation to contemporary circumstances, Moreau being depicted as Ajax, and Bonaparte as Agamemnon. The few minor poems of Foscolo are admirable, full of weighty lines that imprint themselves on the memory. As a critic he accomplished more than it will be easy to accomplish after him, coming just at the moment when Europe, weary of the superficial æsthetics of the eighteenth century, was anxiously looking for a guide to the spirit of the past. It is as much by this happy fortune as by their intrinsic merit that his essays mark an era in the literary history of Dante, Petrarch, Tasso, and Boccaccio.

Foscolo's agitated life has afforded matter for many biographers, but the essential facts lie in narrow compass. Born in Zante of mixed Venetian and Greek parentage, he early sought Venice, and learned the secret of literary style from Cesarotti, the translator of Ossian. The shameful extinction of the Venetian Republic by France and Austria combined with his own ill-regulated passions to make him write *Jacopo Ortis* and talk of imitating his suicidal hero. A spell of military service, partly at the siege of Genoa, partly in the army destined for the in-

vasion of England, went far to cure him, and he spent several years as a man of letters at Milan, translating Homer, composing his tragedies, and too much engaged in unedifying literary quarrels for his own dignity or the credit of letters. He showed an honourable independence in rejecting the bribes offered to induce him to adulate Napoleon, and, equally spurning the proffered subvention of the Austrian Government, became an exile at the overthrow of the Empire. He ultimately took refuge in England, exchanged, he might have boasted, for Byron. Here he was warmly received in aristocratic as well as literary circles, and might have performed a distinguished part. But his extravagance and his irregular habits wore out his friends' patience, though Mr. Smiles says: "Ugo Foscolo lived to the end of his life surrounded by all that was luxurious and beautiful." If so, Hudson Gurney, who raised his tomb, must have given him bread as well as a stone. He was also affectionately tended by his natural daughter, whose mother was an Englishwoman. He died in September 1827. Some of his best critical work belongs to this last period, and a valuable correspondence from English friends is understood to be awaiting publication. His own letters are admirable, full of life and movement.

Little as IPPOLITO PINDEMONTE (1754–1825) resembled Foscolo either as an author or as a man, their names are frequently associated on account of Pindemonte's reply to Foscolo's *Sepolcri*, a fine poem breathing the spirit of resignation and tranquillity, for which his gloomy predecessor had left him abundant scope. Pindemonte's best production, however, is his *Antonio Foscarini*, a true tale of unhappy love, recited with great pathos in elegant octaves. He is a kind of Italian Cowper, a gentle and

amiable valetudinarian. Like Cowper, he sang country life, and touched the events and the manners of his times in a strain of soft elegiac melancholy; like Cowper, too, he translated Homer. He holds no such important position in Italian as Cowper does in English literature, but represents the large class of his fellow-citizens who, carrying the spirit of the eighteenth century into the nineteenth, were rather ornamental than useful to their country.

Monti and Foscolo, with all their genius, could not escape the influence of their times. In the French and Italian literature of the Imperial period, and still more in its art, a certain pseudo-classical affectation is visible. Sublimity and grace are attained indeed, but there is something mannered about the one, and something fastidious about the other. The reigning taste required to be brought nearer to Nature, and the writer who could effect this was sure to mark an epoch in the literature of his country. The mission was discharged by ALESSANDRO MANZONI (1785–1873), a man who announces a new departure in many ways, and whose historical significance, even more than his fine genius, places him above the still more gifted Leopardi at the head of the Italian literature of the first half of the nineteenth century. From one point of view he signalises the invasion of the romantic spirit. Goethe, Byron, Shakespeare, Scott are more to him than the old Italian masters. From another, he founds the Neo-Catholic school, and personifies the revival of the religious spirit in its most gentle and edifying form. Monti and Foscolo had been sceptics; Manzoni is devout, while at the same time there is nothing grotesque in his mediævalism, and he keeps the spheres of religion and politics so apart as to be able

to hail the downfall of the temporal power. Yet, again, he is a reformer of the language, and the first to form a style equally acceptable to his cultured and to his unlettered countrymen.

The hero of these various achievements was singularly unlike the usual type of great renovators and innovators. Such epoch-making personages rarely want for self-assertion. Manzoni was a gentle, undemonstrative man, though observant of others and not ignorant of his own worth, and capable of sarcasm on occasion; a valetudinarian, whose dread of crowds frequently confined him to his house, who made no display, mounted no rostrum, and ceased to write at forty. Hence, though *I Promessi Sposi* is probably more widely known than any Italian book after the *Divina Commedia*, the author has failed to personally impress the European imagination, and appears a mere shadow in comparison with Victor Hugo or even Lamartine, neither of whom, notwithstanding their infinitely greater productiveness, so profoundly influenced the literature of their country. Born at Milan, Manzoni was an Austrian subject, and, though a true patriot, shunned to offend the ruling powers. He led the life of a respectable Italian gentleman of moderate fortune, at one time greatly impaired by his father's extravagance, and basked for nearly half a century in the tranquil enjoyment of European fame, which, after the success of *I Promessi Sposi*, he imperilled by no further venture. "Formerly," he said in excuse, "the Muse came after me, now I should have to go after her." The events of 1848 failed to draw him from his retirement; when the unity of Italy was accomplished he accepted public honours, but declined public duties; none criticised his inaction,

for all felt that he had done his best by Italy. His death at the age of eighty-eight evoked such a unanimity of sentiment as has perhaps accompanied that of no great author of modern times except Sir Walter Scott. Goethe had hostile detractors. Settembrini and the few others who presumed to criticise Manzoni urged their scruples in a spirit of becoming reverence.

Manzoni's claim to this universal veneration was threefold. In the first place, he was really a great writer; in the second, he was the standard-bearer of Italian literature, the one contemporary author of his nation who could be named along with Goethe and Byron; thirdly and chiefly, he represented the most important intellectual movement of the post-Napoleonic age, the romantic and mediæval reaction — a necessity, for justice demanded it. The Middle Age was indeed no model for the nineteenth century, as the romanticists and reactionaries thought, but it did possess elements indispensable for the enrichment of the national life; and although the Italian mind was probably less in harmony with these than the mind of any other people, no Italian could forget that the greatest of his countrymen was also the greatest and most representative writer of the Middle Ages. It had been one of Monti's chief merits to have emulated and revived the style of Dante, to the disgust of Pope Pius VI., who asked him why on earth he could not write like Metastasio. After the form came the spirit of the *Divine Comedy*, commended to the nation by the misfortunes and deceptions which succeeded the fall of Napoleon, when the exile of Florence appeared more than ever a symbol of his country. The worshippers of Dante were indeed divided, some seeing in him the Ghibelline, the enemy of the temporal power no less than

of the foreigner; others, the apostle of mediæval Catholicism. Both views were right and both wrong, and the choice between them was merely a matter of temperament, but the latter was the more likely to be propagated by the air of the time.

The gentle and modest Manzoni obeyed the more potent influence. In 1812 he began to produce his hymns, mostly on the festivals of the Church, which perhaps suggested Keble's *Christian Year*. They were published in 1815, but the finest, that for Whitsunday, is a later addition. They attracted little attention until the appearance of his famous ode on the death of Napoleon, *Il Cinque Maggio*, which, appearing at the right "psychological moment," at a time when every man felt almost as an intimate of the great conqueror who had made so large a portion of his own existence, took Italy and Europe by storm. The note of personal compassion which pervades it was then in place, but now that Napoleon's exploits and disasters are ancient history, and he is chiefly regarded as a great world-shaker and incarnate elemental force, we feel the need of a deeper insight and a wider sweep. Even Manzoni's fire and eloquence, vivid as they are, scarcely rival Lamartine's on the same subject. A patriotic poem of equal power, the ode on the march of the Piedmontese volunteers to succour the Lombards in 1821, imaginary as fact, but veracious as prophecy, has suffered less, or indeed nothing, from the lapse of time, expressing the deepest feelings of every Italian heart now as then. Though composed in 1821, it was not so much as written down until 1848, from apprehension of the Austrian police. No less fine are the lyrics in Manzoni's tragedies, the *Carmagnola* (1820) and the *Adelchi* (1822).

These dramas themselves mark an epoch in Italian literary history, not so much from their absolute merit, as from being the first attempt to adapt Shakespearian methods to the Italian drama. Alfieri and Monti had adhered to the classical school; Manzoni struck into a new path, and by so doing revealed a new world to his countrymen, little as it followed that the old world need be entirely forsaken. The *Carmagnola* depicts the condottieri of the fifteenth century, the *Adelchi* the Lombards of the eighth. The latter is the more dramatic, and the two principal characters, Adelchi and Ermengarda, are depicted with extreme beauty and power. The pieces, however, are rather dramatic poems than plays, and rise highest where there is most scope for poetry. Martin the Deacon's description of his journey in the *Adelchi*, for instance, so finely translated by Mr. W. D. Howells, is magnificent, but on a scale disproportioned to the play. The fire and spirit of the two martial lyrics in the *Carmagnola* and the *Adelchi* respectively are marvellous; "their wonderful plunging metre," it has been said, "suggests a charge of horses." That in the *Adelchi* should alone vindicate Manzoni against the accusation of unpatriotic lukewarmness. It paints the lot of the Italian people of the eighth century, transferred by the fortune of war from a Lombard master to a Frank, who unite to oppress them, and nothing can be more evident than the contemporary application to Italian, Austrian, and Frenchman. The following slightly abridged version is by Miss Ellen Clerke:

"*From moss-covered ruin of edifice nameless,*
From forests, from furnaces idle and flameless,
From furrows bedewed with the sweat of the slave,

A people dispersed doth arouse and awaken,
With senses all straining and pulses all shaken,
At a sound of strange clamour that swells like a wave.

In visages pallid, and eyes dim and shrouded,
As blinks the pale sun through a welkin beclouded,
The might of their fathers a moment is seen;
In eye and in countenance doubtfully blending,
The shame of the present seems dumbly contending
With pride in the thought of a past that hath been.

Now they gather in hope to disperse panic-stricken,
And in tortuous ways their pace slacken or quicken,
As, 'twixt longing and fear, they advance or stand still,
Gazing once and again where, despairing and scattered,
The host of their tyrants flies broken and shattered
From the wrath of the swords that are drinking their fill.

As wolves that the hunter hath cowed and subjected,
Their hair on their hides in dire horror erected,
So these to their covert distractedly fly;
And hope springs anew in the breast of the peasant;
O'ertaking the future in joy of the present,
He deems his chain broken, and broken for aye.

Nay, hearken! Yon heroes in victory warring,
From refuge and rescue the routed debarring,
By path steep and rugged have come from afar,
Forsaking the halls of their festive carousing,
From downy repose on soft couches arousing,
In haste to obey the shrill summons of war.

They have left in their castles their wives broken-hearted,
Who, striving to part, still refused to be parted,
With pleadings and warnings that died on the tongue.
The war-dinted helmet the brow hath surmounted,
And soon the dark chargers are saddled and mounted,
And hollow the bridge to their gallop hath rung.

From land unto land they have speeded and fleeted,
With lips that the lay of the soldier repeated,
But hearts that have harboured their home and its bowers.

They have watched, they have starved, by grim discipline driven,
And hauberk and helm have been battered and riven,
And arrows around them have whistled in showers.

And deem ye, poor fools! that the meed and the guerdon
That lured from afar were to lighten your burden,
Your wrongs to abolish, your fate to reverse?
Go! back to the wrecks of your palaces stately,
To the forges whose glow ye extinguished so lately,
To the field ye have tilled in the sweat of your curse!

The victor and vanquished, in amity knitted,
Have doubled the yoke to your shoulders refitted;
One tyrant had quelled you, and now ye have twain.
They cast forth the lot for the serf and the cattle,
They throne on the sods that yet bleed from their battle,
And the soil and the hind are their servants again."

If Manzoni was surpassed as a dramatist and equalled as a lyrist by others among his countrymen, he has hitherto found no competitor as a novelist. *I Promessi Sposi* (1825) was the first great Italian romance, and it remains the greatest. It would be difficult to transcend its capital merits, the beauty and truth of description, the interest of its leading characters, and its perfect fidelity to life, if not in every respect to the place and period where and when the scene is laid—Milan under the dreary Spanish rule of the seventeenth century—yet to the universal feelings and instincts of humanity. As a picture of human nature the book is above criticism; it is just the fact, neither more nor less. "It satisfies us," said Goethe, "like perfectly ripe fruit." It has, notwithstanding, a weak side, which Goethe did not fail to point out—the prominence of the historical element, and the dryness with which the writer exhibits his authorities, instead of dissolving them in the flow of his narrative. "The German translator," said Goethe, "must get rid

of a great part of the war and the famine, and two-thirds of the plague." Other objections to Manzoni's romance refer to its real or supposed tendencies, which leave its artistic merits unaffected. It may be granted that panegyrics upon Cardinal Federigo Borromeo, however just, were hardly seasonable when the Pope was the fast ally of the Austrian; and Manzoni did still worse by his country when (1819) he wrote a treatise on Catholic Morals, unexceptionable when there should be no more question of the Temporal Power. But he then cherished generous illusions which he was ultimately obliged to renounce; though never parting with one of the leading and most remarkable features of *I Promessi Sposi*, its sympathy with the poor and lowly. It is a remarkable proof of the difficulties of style which beset the Italian author, that Manzoni found it necessary to give his romance a thorough revision to bring its diction nearer to the Tuscan standard. His other prose works comprise, the *Column of Infamy*, an historical appendix to *I Promessi Sposi*, *Letters on Romanticism*, an able polemic on behalf of the romantic school, and *Letters on the Unities of Time and Place*, demonstrating that the unity of action is the only unity which need be regarded by the dramatist.

The success of *I Promessi Sposi* could not but create a school of historical novelists in Italy, whose works probably effected more for the propagation of Italian literature beyond the Alps than those of any writer except Manzoni himself. The *Marco Visconti* of Tommaso Grossi, the *Ettorre Fieramosca* of Massimo d'Azeglio, the *Margherita Pusterla* of Cesare Cantù, are romances of great merit, but, as the author of one of them exclaims, "How far we are behind Manzoni!"

Little as any anti-national motive can be attributed to the *Adelchi*, it is true that Manzoni's patriotism was chiefly evinced in his lyrics, and that he was not prominent as a patriotic dramatist. This part was reserved for GIOVANNI BATTISTA NICCOLINI (1782–1861). In times of trial and distress the measure of service is apt to be the measure of applause, and popular gratitude may for a time have exalted Niccolini's tragedies to a higher level than that due to their strictly literary desert. They are nevertheless fine productions, and the most patriotic are usually the best. *Arnaldo di Brescia*, too bold an apotheosis of the fiery monk who defied the Papacy in the twelfth century to be printed in Italy for many years after its appearance in France, is the most poetical, but is neither intended nor adapted for the stage. Notwithstanding its historical subject, this mighty tragedy, as Mr. W. D. Howells, the translator of some of its finest passages, not unjustly terms it, is an idealistic work. The other dramas, taken from history, and representing such crises in Italian story as the destruction of Florentine liberty and the Sicilian Vespers, are more compliant with ordinary dramatic rules; but the most celebrated and successful on the stage is *Antonio Foscarini*, founded on the same incident in Venetian history that had afforded the subject of Pindemonte's poem. Before he became imbued with the spirit of the romantic school, Niccolini had acquired great distinction as a classical dramatist, especially by his *Polissena* and his *Medea*. His first performance, *Nabucco* (1816), idealised the fall of Napoleon in a Babylonian tragedy. Among his plays is a free translation of Shelley's *Cenci*, in general excellent, but remarkable for the entire disfigurement of the opening speech, no doubt for prudential reasons. At first poor,

afterwards in easy circumstances, Niccolini spent an uneventful life in the service of the Academy of Florence; his mode of living was sequestered, and his character stainless.

With all his good-will, Niccolini could deal no such blows at foreign or domestic oppressors as that which a brother dramatist of greatly inferior power delivered by the mere record of his sufferings. *Le Mie Prigioni* made SILVIO PELLICO (1789–1854) as typical a figure as the Iron Mask or the Prisoner of Chillon, and won Italy a moral victory in her darkest day (1832). It is needless to give any particular account of so famous a book. The candid and innocent author was born to move mankind by a single story, and to relapse into obscurity after delivering his message. His dramas and lyrics do not exceed mediocrity, with the exception of *Francesca da Rimini* (1818), a tragedy full of tender feeling, admired by Byron, to whom the version of some scenes in the *Quarterly Review* has been attributed. They were, however, in fact rendered by Milman.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE REGENERATION

THAT only one of the distinguished writers reviewed in the last chapter should have given free expression to the Italian craving for liberty and national unity, may be accounted for in the simplest possible manner. Foscolo was the only one in exile; the unexpatriated, writing under a censorship, said not what they would, but what they could. Apart, nevertheless, from this consideration, it is true that the national movement was slow in acquiring energy and consistency, inasmuch as it was not in the first instance an indigenous growth. The conception of an Italian nation under a single political head had not been too clearly formulated, even by Petrarch and Machiavelli, and since the latter's time had been in great measure the exclusive possession of the finest minds. As an upbursting bubble may hint at what is passing in the depths of the sea, so Gernando's scoff in the *Gerusalemme Liberata* at Rinaldo as a native of *la serva Italia* reveals the hidden workings of Tasso's spirit, and vindicates him from the charge of ludicrously servile adulation. Nothing more ridiculous can be conceived than the poet's notion that his patron Alphonso might well lead either the armies or the fleets of Europe in a new crusade if he was to be no more than a Duke of Ferrara; not so if the headship of a united and regenerated Italy was to fall to him.

The next generation reposed hopes premature, indeed—yet, as the far-off event was to show, not irrational—in the house of Savoy; but as time wore on and material circumstances improved, these patriotic aspirations waned, and the call for liberty which came from France in the revolutionary era had to create the sentiment to which it appealed. Any prospect of such a response seemed destroyed by the behaviour of the French propaganda itself—its infamous betrayal of the Venetian Republic, its exactions from private fortunes, pillages from public treasuries, and wholesale robbery of Italian works of art. Yet by an extraordinary turn of events the chief perpetrator of these iniquities, himself an Italian, became most undesignedly on his own part the father of Italian unity and freedom. By crowning himself King of Italy, Napoleon Bonaparte gave her a national existence. After a few years of his rule the inhabitants of the peninsula could not but perceive that the visions of their seers and the aspirations of their statesmen had in great measure come to pass.

Notwithstanding the existence of some nominally independent principalities, for the first time since Theodoric the Italians of the North at all events actually were Italians—not Lombards, or Tuscans, or Piedmontese. They were indeed ruled by a despot; but to this, with the practical instinct of their race, the Italians submitted in the prevision that Napoleon's empire must be dissolved by his death, and the hope that the national unity would survive it and him. Such might well have been the case had his authority been peacefully transmitted to a successor; but the circumstances of his downfall inevitably brought back the Austrians and the exiled princes, to reign no longer over a contented or an indifferent people,

but over one which had taken the idea of national unity to its heart. The effect on literature is illustrated by a passage in one of Byron's letters from Italy: "They talk Dante, write Dante, and think and dream Dante to an extent that would be ridiculous but that he deserves it." It was not so much the recognition of Dante's literary desert which occasioned this reaction from eighteenth-century neglect, as the incarnation of the sufferings and the genius of his country in his person.

A generation thus nurtured on Dante, and on Dante studied from such a point of view, could not but grow up serious and patriotic. Nor were other literary influences wanting. The fourth canto of *Childe Harold*, and even more Madame de Staël's *Corinne*, contrasted in the most forcible manner the past artistic and intellectual glories with the actual political degradation, and showed Italy how far she had fallen, but also how high she might hope to reascend. Such influences imbued the youthful generation with a more impassioned and enthusiastic character than its fathers. The new aspirations embodied themselves most distinctly in three men—Mazzini, type of physical resistance to oppression; Giusti, of relentless opposition in the intellectual sphere; Leopardi, of the passive protest of martyrdom. In him, as by an emblem, the beauty and the anguish of the suffering country are shown forth, and on this account no less than from the superiority of his literary genius, though no active insurgent against the established order of things, he claims the first place in his hapless but glorious generation.

The tragical yet uneventful life of GIACOMO LEOPARDI was little else than ardent cultivation of the spirit and constant struggle with the infirmities of the body. Born in 1798 at Recanati, a small dull town near Rimini,

the son of a learned and high-minded, but unfortunately bigoted and retrograde Italian nobleman, of anti-national politics and antiquarian tastes, whose embarrassed circumstances and incapacity for business had induced him to assign his property to a practical but parsimonious wife, Leopardi solaced the forlornness of existence in a spiritual desert by intense study, favoured by his father's extensive library, in which he immured himself to a degree propitious to neither bodily nor mental health. So extraordinary were his powers that at nineteen, besides many excellent *bonâ fide* translations, he produced imaginary versions of lost Greek authors which deceived accomplished classical scholars. But the maladies from which he was to suffer all his life had already made progress; he could follow no profession, and was entirely dependent upon well-intentioned but uncongenial parents, whose dread of the liberal and free-thinking opinions he had imbibed, chiefly from correspondence with Pietro Giordani, induced them to imprison him at home.

Though solaced by the affection of his brother Carlo and his sister Paolina, Leopardi's position was most uncomfortable, and the chief external events of his history for many years are his temporary escapes and his enforced returns. He sought refuge successively at Rome, Bologna, and Florence, meeting with friends everywhere, especially at Rome, where he won the esteem and excited the wonder of Niebuhr and Bunsen. His craving for deeper sympathy twice involved him in love affairs, both fruitful in humiliation and disappointment. Nothing else, indeed, could be expected for the suit of the pallid, deformed youth, whose blood barely circulated, whose indigestion almost deprived him of nourishment, whose

feeble limbs bent beneath the weight of a body even so attenuated, and whose heart and lungs scarcely discharged their office. All active life seemed concentrated in his brain, which throve and energised at the expense of every other organ. He executed some work for the booksellers, especially his condensed but invaluable comment on Petrarch, and from time to time gave expression to some slowly-maturing thought, in literary form meet for immortality, but unvalued and unrecompensed by his contemporaries.

Neither Leopardi's patriotic sentiments nor his speculative opinions could be disclosed under the pressure of Austrian and Bourbon despotism; the King of Sardinia had not yet declared himself on the side of liberty, and there was literally no spot in Italy where an Italian could write what he thought. Emigration to France or England would have been forbidden by his parents, upon whom he was entirely dependent. At length, in September 1833, he was able to establish himself at Naples, where for a time his health and spirits seemed marvellously improved; but from the summer of 1836 these retrograded, and he succumbed to a sudden aggravation of the dropsy which had long threatened him, on June 14, 1837. His unpublished philological writings were bequeathed to a Swiss friend, Professor de Sinner, who neglected his trust. The MSS., however, were bought from his heirs by the Italian Government, and have been partially published. Leopardi's other works were faithfully edited by Antonio Ranieri, a friend whose devoted kindness to him during his life renders it utterly incomprehensible how he should have sought to blacken his memory after his death by the publication of a number of painful and humiliating circumstances, which, if they had been facts, should have

been consigned to oblivion, but which Dr. Franco Ridella has shown to be mere invention.

While he still posed as Leopardi's Pythias, Ranieri summed up his friend's titles to renown as, "first a great philologer, next a great poet, at the last a great philosopher." Great poet he unquestionably was; his refined classical scholarship might have earned him the distinction of a great philologer in a sense disused since comparative philology has taken rank among the exact sciences; if he was a great philosopher, so Voltaire and Lucian must be esteemed. The keen sensibility to pain which dominated his mental constitution was as little associated with any constructive faculty or capacity for systematic thought as was their hatred of pretence and perception of the ludicrous; but while their endowments were brilliantly serviceable to mankind, Leopardi's moral pathology, if it had any potency at all, could operate only for ill. Mischievous attempts have indeed been made to accredit the pessimism of our times by exalting the cries wrung by anguish from a wretched invalid into the last and ripest fruit of the tree of knowledge. Whatever may be the case in Oriental countries, there has seldom been a pessimist in the West without some moral or physical malady which ought to have withheld him from assuming the part of an instructor of mankind; but Leopardi's pessimism is not only morbid, but unmanly. The stress which he lays upon merely physical evils, such as heat and cold, hunger and thirst, would have moved the contempt of an ancient sage of any sect; and the contemporary of so many martyrs for their country admits no spring of human action but naked egotism. The grandeur and beauty of material nature, the sublime creations of man's spirit, the teeming

harvest of human virtues and affections, the tranquillising recognition of eternal order and controlling law, the marvellous course of the world's history, when not ignored, are treated as the mere mockery and aggravation of the entirely imaginary background of blackness—a shining leprosy upon a hideous countenance. And yet the real nature of the man was quite different; his pessimism and egotism are simply the product of bodily suffering, of the wounded self-esteem and disappointed affections which followed in its train, and of the absence of any outlet for his surpassing intellectual powers.

It was a cruel injury to Italy that her greatest modern genius should have done so little for her regeneration, and that his writings, instead of inspiring a healthy public spirit, should rather tend to foster the selfish indifference and the despair of good which continue to be her principal bane. In two points of view, nevertheless, Leopardi rendered his country essential service. His sufferings, and the moral infirmities which they entailed, enabled him to represent in his own person, as no soundly-constituted man could have done, the unhappy Italy of his day. He seemed the living symbol of a country naturally favoured beyond all others, but racked and dismembered by foreign and domestic tyrants, the counterparts in the body politic of the maladies which crippled Leopardi's energies, and distorted his views of man and nature. At the same time the transcendent excellence of his scanty literary performances raised Italian literature to a height which, Alfieri and Monti notwithstanding, it had not attained since Tasso, and in the midst of an epoch of servitude and subjugation gave Italians at least one thing of which they might justly be proud.

The bulk of Leopardi's writings, indeed, is diminutive, and the range of his ideas narrow; but within these limits he has approached absolute perfection more closely, not only than any other Italian, but than any modern writer. He is one of that small and remarkable class of men who have arisen here and there in recent Europe to reproduce each some peculiar aspect of the ancient Greek genius. As Shelley is a Greek by his pantheism, Keats by his feeling for nature, Platen by the architectonic of his verse, so is Leopardi by his impeccability. All the best Greek productions, whether of poetic or of plastic art, have this character of inevitableness: they can neither be better nor other than they are. It is not the same in romantic poetry. Shakespeare no doubt always chose the best path, but he always seems to have had the choice among a thousand. In almost everything of Leopardi's, whether verse or prose, form and thought appear indissolubly interfused without the possibility of disjunction. This is eminently the case with his poems, perfect examples of lofty and sustained eloquence entirely uncontaminated by rhetoric. There are few thoughts which strike by their novelty, few elaborated similes, few phrases which stand forth in isolation from the environing text. All seems of a piece; but the words chosen are invariably the most apt to express the idea sought to be conveyed, and the stream of sentiment is as pellucid as it is impetuous. The same mastery is evinced in the descriptive passages, which never appear to exist for their own sakes, but as depicting the inner feeling of the poem by a visible symbol. Be the subject small or great, from the disappearance of a vast landscape at the setting of the moon, or the terrified peasant listening sleeplessly to the roar of Vesuvius, down to the

rain pattering at the poet's window, or the rattle of the carriage resuming its journey after the storm, these descriptions impress by their perfect adequacy and their complete fusion of speech and thought, and it can only be objected to them that they are finer than the moralities they usher in. So wrote the Greeks, and the recovery of an apparently lost type makes amends for the monotony of Leopardi's dismal message to mankind and the extreme limitation of his range of thought. In his later days his horizon seemed to expand; his seriocomic *Paralipomeni*, already noticed with other examples of its class, displays an unexpected versatility, and his last ode, *La Ginestra*, inspired by the hardy and humble broom-plant flourishing on the brink of the lava-fields of Vesuvius, is more original in conception and ampler in sweep than any of its predecessors. It somewhat resembles Shelley's *Mont Blanc;* as Shelley's *Triumph of Life*, with equal unconsciousness on the author's part, approximates to Leopardi's first important poem, the *Appressamento alla Morte*. They had here a common model in Petrarch.

Leopardi's poems, though the majority are in blank verse, may generally be defined as canzoni, either odes in the strict sense of the term, addresses to friends, impassioned outpourings of lonely thought akin to Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," or apostrophes to inanimate objects, such as the moon, the natural friend of the melancholy poet, or the Vesuvian broom-plant, already mentioned. A few pieces, such as *Il Primo Amore*, *Il Risorgimento*, are autobiographical; in these Leopardi usually adopts *terza rima* or the ordinary rhymed metres. Personal as these pieces are in subject, they are not really more subjective than the rest. Leopardi is entirely

devoid of inventive power: the wandering shepherd of Asia, mouthpiece for one of his finest poems, is the author in everything but costume. Three of the most celebrated odes, *To Italy*, *On the Florentine Monument to Dante*, and *To Angelo Mai on the Recovery of Cicero De Republica*, may be styled patriotic; but although the love of Italy is clearly and eloquently expressed, the scorn of her actual condition, the fault of no one then breathing, is so bitter and contumelious that the effect is anything but Tyrtæan. These are nevertheless masterpieces of noble diction, and little short of miraculous for the age of twenty, at which they were produced. It is perhaps a defect that lines are frequently left unrhymed, and that the ear is thus defrauded of an anticipated satisfaction.

Leopardi's blank verse is the finest in Italian literature. If it has neither the "wood-note wild" of Shakespeare's sweetest passages, nor the voluminous harmony of Milton's organ-music, nor the dainty artifice of Tennyson, it is fully on a par with the finest metrical performances of Shelley and Coleridge; and perhaps the English reader could hardly obtain a better idea of it than by imagining a blending of the manner of Coleridge's idylls with that of Shelley's *Alastor*. It admits of translation into English; while an adequate rendering of the strictly lyrical poems, so smooth and yet so muscular, like the marble statue of an athlete, would be an achievement of very great difficulty. Perhaps the following little piece may convey some idea of Leopardi's manner in blank verse. Few are the poems in which a mere triviality has been made the occasion of a meditation so sublime:

> "*Dear to me ever was this lonely hill,*
> *And this low hedge, whose potent littleness*
> *Forbids the vast horizon to the eye.*

For, as I sit and muse, my fancy frames
Interminable space beyond its bound,
And silence more than human, and secure
Unutterable and unending rest,
Where even the heart hath peace. And as I hear
The faint wind's breath among the trees, my mind
Compares these lispings with the infinite hush
Of that invisible distance, and the dead
And unborn hours of dim eternity
With this hour and its voices. Thus my thought
Gulfing infinity doth swallow up;
And sweet to me is shipwreck in this sea."

Leopardi's prose works, his correspondence and philological essays excepted, are, like his poetry, limited in extent and in range of subject, but incomparable for refinement and beauty of form. He deemed a perfect prose more beautiful and more difficult of achievement than poetry of like rank, and related to it as the undraped figure to the figure clothed. The most remarkable of his prose writings are the Dialogues, which almost all turn upon the everlasting theme of the misery of mankind, varied in the exposition with a grace and fanciful ingenuity recalling the little apologues in Turgenev's *Senilia.* In one, Mercury and Atlas play at ball with the earth, become light as tinder by internal decay and the extinction of life; in another, the earth and the moon compare notes on the infelicity of their respective inhabitants; in another, Momus and Prometheus descend to earth to investigate the success of the latter's philanthropic inventions, which have answered Momus's expectations better than his; in another, Tasso's familiar genius promises to make him happy in the only possible manner, by a pleasing dream. Comparison is continually suggested with two great writers, Lucian and Pascal, and

Leopardi sustains it worthily. Inferior to Lucian in racy humour, to Pascal in keenness of sarcasm, he surpasses both in virtue of the poetical endowment which nature had utterly denied to them. In form he comes nearest to Lucian, in spirit to Pascal. Lucian, a healthy four-square man, robust in common-sense, little given to introspection and untroubled by sensitiveness, is constitutionally very unlike Leopardi; but it might be difficult to establish a closer parallel than between the Italian and the French recluse; both very sparing but very choice writers; exquisite scholars in classics and mathematics respectively; both hopeless pessimists because hopeless invalids; the keenest and most polished intellects of their time, and yet further astray on the most momentous subjects than many a man "whose talk is of bullocks." Leopardi has the advantage in so far that his scorn of man never degenerates into misanthropy, and his negation is better than Pascal's superstition.

Leopardi's strictly ethical writings (*Storia del Genere Umano; Parini*, or *On Glory; Bruto Minore; Filippo Ottonieri*) are necessarily devoid of imaginative form, and hence want the peculiar charm of his Dialogues, but are not inferior in classical finish. They bring out a more serious defect of his thought than even his pessimism—his ultra-hedonism in definition of happiness as a succession of momentary pleasurable emotions, each to be enjoyed as something complete in itself without reference to antecedents or consequences. This theory, said to have originated with Aristippus of Cyrene, is precisely that put forth by Walter Pater at the beginning of his career, but afterwards virtually retracted. There is one human condition, and but one, which it actually does suit, and that is Leopardi's own—the condition of the chronic

invalid. To the sufferer whose life is a continual physical agony, the brief intervals of ease actually are the utmost bliss he is capable of conceiving, and he may well be forgiven if he makes a succession of such thrills of pleasure the ideal of life. From any other point of view this hedonism is the doctrine of a voluptuary, which Leopardi assuredly was not. His mode of thought, nevertheless, increased his infelicity by depriving him of solace from the anticipation of posthumous fame, for which, as no ingenuity could prove it a pleasurable sensation, his hedonistic materialism left no place. With his low estimate of men, he could repose little hope in their justice; nor, though perfectly aware of the supreme literary excellence of his own writings, could he feel the assurance of their immortality which is only possible to him who regards the universe as incarnate Reason. His verdict upon himself and them, widely at variance with the truth, but logical from his own point of view, is pathetically summed up in his epitaph on the imaginary Filippo Ottonieri, his own ideal portrait: "*Here lies Filippo Ottonieri, born for renown and virtuous deeds; who lived without profit and died without fame; ignorant neither of his nature nor of his fortune.*"

Many of Leopardi's detached meditations and aphorisms evince great subtlety and accuracy of observation, distorted by his persistent determination to think ill of the human race as a whole, while amicably and often affectionately disposed towards its individual members. His philological writings are those of an accomplished scholar, but their themes are generally of minor importance. His letters are frequently most pathetic in their references to his wretched situation,

which alone can excuse the frequent insincerity of those addressed to his father. On the whole, his faults and his virtues are such as to render him the most lively representation of the Italy of his day, superior to the Italy of a past age in so far as awakened to a consciousness of her abject condition, but not yet nerved to struggle for her redemption.

While Leopardi, although at heart a patriot, was virtually proclaiming patriotism a phantom, a poet of a very different cast was assailing abuses and preparing a better day by dint of humorous indignation and sturdy hopefulness. The Italy of the time stands between Leopardi and GIUSEPPE GIUSTI (1809–50) like Garrick between tragedy and comedy. Giusti's gifts were less sublime than Leopardi's, but not less original. What Leopardi was to the Italian language in its most classical form, Giusti was to the peculiar niceties of the most idiomatic Tuscan. What Leopardi was to the most elevated description of poetry, Giusti was to political satire. Indeed he was more, for Leopardi merely carried recognised form to more consummate perfection, while Giusti's style was actually created by him. Rich as Italy had been in most kinds of humorous and burlesque poetry, she had achieved little in political satire for very evident reasons. Campanella and Alfieri had verged upon it; and Casti's *Animali Parlanti* and Leopardi's *Paralipomeni* may, from one point of view, be regarded as political satires, though rather belonging to the mock-heroic epic. But no political satirist had yet reached the heart of the people, partly because few had the courage to make the attempt, partly because metrical satire was as yet restricted to refined and artificial forms. The gallantry with which Giusti, living under the absolute government

of Tuscany, itself wholly subservient to Austria, launched shaft after shaft against the oppressors of his country, is paralleled by the boldness of the literary innovation he made in discarding the time-honoured forms of blank verse and *terza rima*, and conveying satire in easy and familiar lyric.

Giusti has been compared to Béranger, but certainly falls short of the Frenchman as a master of song, while he has more of the sacred fire of poetical indignation. The Anacreontic side of Béranger's genius has no counterpart in him. As a master of idiomatic Tuscan he stands alone; but his poems require a glossary, and what helps his fame with his countrymen hinders it with foreigners. His satires are sometimes called forth by the occurrences of the day, but are more frequently directed at some persistent evil or misfortune of the country; and although the expulsion of the foreigner and his vassals is the idea most commonly in the background, not a few of the best pieces treat of the defects of the Italian people itself, the frivolity of some classes of society, the ignorance and superstition of others, and not least the pretentious emptiness of much modern liberalism. The general tone of Giusti's compositions is easy and humorous; but under the impulse of emotion he is capable of rising into high poetry, as in the description of the corruption of Florentine society in his *Gingillino*, or in the palinode to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, when (October 1847) the poet for a moment believed that Leopold was about to pursue a liberal course.

Giusti would have found it difficult to reconcile this attitude with the aspirations for the unity of Italy which he had expressed in his *Stivale* in 1836, but it soon appeared that Leopold's constitutionalism was of a piece

with the monastic inclinations attributed to invalid devils, and Giusti went back into opposition, more annoyed and dispirited by the follies and vagaries of his own party than by the iniquities of the enemy. The French Revolution of February 1848 gave the upper hand to the Tuscan liberals, who had superabundantly manifested their incapacity ere, in March 1849, the fate of Tuscany was decided on the battlefield of Novara. The heart-broken poet, already suffering from grievous illness, could not survive until the better day, dying on 31st March 1850. *Chi dura vince.* His profession had been that of an advocate, and, until his last days, his life was uneventful except for an unfortunate attachment. It certainly speaks for the lenity of the Tuscan Government that he should not have spent much of it in prison, for his satires from 1833 to 1847 circulated widely in manuscript, and some were printed in Switzerland in his lifetime. They must suffer with posterity for their general relation to temporary circumstances; but Giusti will ever retain the honour of having been the first to apply ordinary Italian speech to the poetical expression of new ideas and new needs, thus enlarging the domain both of language and of literature.

The best English translations from Giusti are the brilliant renderings by Mr. W. D. Howells, especially that of the striking poem of *St. Ambrose*, where an Italian is represented as moved to sympathy with the Austrian soldiers by the beauty of

> "*A German anthem that to heaven went*
> *On unseen wings, up from the holy fane;*
> *It was a prayer, and seemed like a lament,*
> *Of such a pensive, grave, pathetic strain,*

That in my soul it never shall be spent;
And how such heavenly harmony in the brain
Of those thick-skulled barbarians should dwell,
I must confess it passes me to tell.

In that sad hymn I felt the bitter sweet
Of the songs heard in childhood, which the soul
Learns from beloved voices, to repeat
To its own anguish in the days of dole:
A thought of the dear mother, a regret,
A longing for repose and love—the whole
Anguish of distant exile seemed to run
Over my heart and leave it all undone.

When the strain ceased, it left me pondering
Tenderer thoughts, and stronger and more clear;
These men, I mused, the self-same despot king
Who rules on Slavic and Italian fear,
Tears from their homes and arms that round them cling,
And drives them slaves thence, to keep as slaves here;
From their familiar fields afar they pass,
Like herds to winter in some strange morass.

Poor souls! far off from all that they hold dear,
And in a land that hates them! Who shall say
That at the bottom of their hearts they bear
Love for our tyrant? I should like to lay
They've our hate for him in their pockets! Here,
But that I turned in haste and broke away,
I should have kissed a corporal, stiff and tall,
And like a scarecrow stuck against the wall."

Affinities with Browning may be observed in these stanzas, and Browning meets Giusti half-way in *Up at a Villa—Down in the City.*

Another popular poet claims a high and exceptional place in Italian letters, not so much from his poetical gift as from his vivid and uncompromising realism. The peculiar domain of GIOACCHINO BELLI (1791–1863) is

the populace of Rome, whose humours, joys, and tragedies he has made his own. He has indeed competitors, but, as his editor Morandi observes, these are but as rivers to the sea in comparison with the fabulous opulence of Belli, who has depicted the life around him in more than two thousand sonnets, each in its way a little masterpiece. Almost all represent some scene in the life of the people, observed in his daily ramble, and versified upon his return home. For spirit and truth to nature most of them are almost comparable to Theocritus's portrait of Praxinoe, and there is probably not another instance in the world of the life of a great city so perfectly delineated in verse, or of such an enormous collection of sonnets of so high an average of merit. The drawback to their general enjoyment is their inevitable composition in the Roman dialect, lively, coloured, and full of comic phrases, but uncouth and corrupt. Another important division of Belli's work is the political sonnet, full of mordant satire on the abuses of the Papal government under Gregory XVI., not the less veracious because the author wished to recall it when the Catholic in him ultimately overcame the Liberal.

The patriotic work of Giusti and of Belli was thus in a measure local; one took charge of Tuscany, and the other of Rome. Another distinguished man took all Italy (the impossible kingdom of the Two Sicilies excepted) for his province, and deserves to be enumerated among the more eminent Italian writers of the nineteenth century who have powerfully contributed to the regeneration of their country. PIETRO GIORDANI (1774–1848) is nevertheless not a great author, and perhaps his highly interesting correspondence is the only portion of his writings which will retain a permanent value. But

he was almost the mainspring of the literary movement of his time. Italian authors resorted to him for ideas, as English authors resorted to Samuel Rogers for breakfasts, and neither went empty away. But for him Leopardi might have wasted his life on classical philology and verbal criticism; he helped Manzoni and Giusti to their fame; he lived familiarly with Niccolini, Capponi, and Colletta, and was the intimate friend of Monti and Canova. The first forty years of his life, spent in various official employments, had been troubled and needy, but he ultimately inherited a fortune, and during the Thirty Years' Peace his activity incessantly pervaded Italian letters like an unseen sap, save when he came forward to promote a savings-bank or an infant-school, or got himself expelled from the territories of some petty prince. His style is highly finished and polished, but is the chief recommendation of his writings, the epistolary excepted.

Finally, among the more distinguished authors of the period who systematically laboured for the deliverance and regeneration of their country must be named two most illustrious men, both called upon to deal with practical affairs, yet chiefly efficacious through their writings, VINCENZO GIOBERTI and GIUSEPPE MAZZINI. Both were subjects of the King of Sardinia—Gioberti a royal chaplain at Turin; Mazzini a man of letters at Genoa writing essays in defence of the romantic school. Both were incarcerated and banished—Gioberti through the animosity of the Jesuits, Mazzini as a Carbonaro. Gioberti betook himself to France, Mazzini to England. Gioberti soon obtained an European reputation by his philosophical [illegible] appear to have materially [illegible] favour of his

country. Mazzini, on the other hand, produced great effects by his mission to England, where the "swift, yet still, Ligurian figure; merciful and fierce; true as steel, the word and thought of him limpid as water" (Carlyle),[1] fascinated the best men and women, and made the emancipation of Italy a cause dear to the heart of the people. On the other hand, he misused the liberality of his friends by promoting a number of petty revolts and foolish expeditions which commonly ended in the destruction of all who participated in them.

Gioberti accomplished infinitely more for the national cause by his great book, *Il Primato d'Italia* (1845), which dissuaded Italy from abortive conspiracies, and preached spiritual as a preparation for political unity. It also, by its own merits and the reputation which the author had already gained as a thinker, compelled men of intellect to look into her case. Unfortunately, Gioberti had not grasped the necessity of absolute administrative concentration, and advocated confederacy among the various Italian states; an idea irreconcilable with that of unity, and moreover utterly impracticable on account of the centrifugalism of the sovereigns concerned. This made it possible for Gioberti, when at length he had himself become minister at Turin, to propose that Piedmont should anticipate the inevitable restoration of the sovereigns of Central Italy by Austria or France by restoring them herself; a step which would have ruined the house of Savoy in public opinion, and consequently have destroyed all hope of an united Italy. Gioberti soon retired to Paris, where he died suddenly in 1852, just as a new chapter of events was opening,

[1] There is a lively portrait of him in Ruffini's *Lorenzo Benoni*, where he is introduced as "Fantasio."

in which, taught by experience, he would probably have performed a more efficient part.

It would have been well for the political, though not the literary reputation of Mazzini if he had died about the same time in the good odour of the courage and capacity he had shown in the defence of Rome against the French. Although he had a great advantage over Gioberti in his perception of the need of national unity, he was unable to conceive of this otherwise than under Republican forms. He was hence almost as ready to thwart the Piedmontese as to expel the Austrian; he opposed every practical scheme for the redemption of Italy, from the Crimean expedition downwards; and his public career down to his death in 1872 is a series of lamentable mistakes. He could not see that his mission was performed when he had once breathed life into the dry bones, and he had no appreciation of the practical genius of a man like Cavour, fully as indispensable to the common cause as his own ideal enthusiasm. Happily there was another and more extensive field in which this enthusiasm was perfectly in place. Mazzini was much more than a conspirator, more even than a patriot. As a man of letters, he concerned himself with German, English, and Slavonic literature, and opened up new horizons to Italian thought. Polish literature was especially congenial to him, for at that period its inspiration came from worlds beyond mortal ken, and Mazzini, recoiling from the prosaic common-sense of the eighteenth century, possessed the vein of mysticism common to contemporaries otherwise so dissimilar as Lamennais, Balzac, George Sand, Newman, Mickiewicz. This gave a singular elevation to his ethical thought. A severe thinker, he meditated much on human rights and human duties, and

assigned precedence to the latter. "Think less of your rights and more of your duties" is the burden of much ethical admonition addressed, especially during his later years, to the working classes, and containing some of the noblest and most dignified teaching to be found in the world. Mazzini had little sympathy with some of the more recent developments of democracy; his life had been one of disinterested privation for great ends, and he thought little, perhaps too little, of merely material ameliorations. His mysticism, his austere magnanimity, and his deeply religious feeling find their most perfect expression in his noble epistle to the members of the Œcumenical Council of 1869, which, along with President Lincoln's oration on the battlefield of Gettysburg, crowns the public eloquence of our time; nor needs the age which has produced two such deliverances to envy in this respect the age of Pericles.

Time has worked and is working for Mazzini; the fanaticism and unreason of one side of his character, having produced no permanent ill effect, fall more and more into oblivion, or are recognised as the necessary conditions of his unique gifts. His failings were the failings of a prophet: little as he was qualified to guide the movement he had evoked, none but such an one as he could have brought about the national resurrection truly described by Mr. Swinburne in the poem where he as truly hails in Mazzini the third Italian prophet after Dante and Michael Angelo:

> "*And the third prophet standing by her grave,*
> *Stretched forth his hand and touched her, and her eyes*
> *Opened as sudden suns in heaven might rise,*
> *And her soul caught from his the faith to save:*
> *Faith above creeds, faith beyond records, born*
> *Of the pure, naked, fruitful, awful morn.*"

There is an ancient story of a princess carried off by a dragon and confined on a desert island in the most remote recesses of the ocean, who owed her deliverance to the joint exertions of three most eminent brothers, none of whom could have accomplished anything without the other two. One, an astrologer, discovered the place of her captivity; the second, a mechanician, made a winged horse; upon which the third, a soldier, proceeded to the spot and slew the dragon. In the liberation of Italy the part of the astrologer fell to Mazzini, that of the mechanician to Cavour, and that of the soldier to Garibaldi.

CHAPTER XXV

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY—MIDDLE PERIOD

LITERATURE, as a rule, must ever be on the side of liberty, for one conclusive reason among others—that liberty is the life of literature. Hence every man of letters is instinctively a partisan of freedom; and even should his political or religious opinions drive him to support a tyranny by which these are protected, or should he be willing to acquiesce in a despotism which maintains peace and encourages art, he must yet disapprove of restraint upon his own productiveness, and this inevitable concession implies all the rest. Poetry —and the remark may in its measure be extended to every department of intellectual labour implying creation or even construction—has been well said to represent the best and happiest moments of the best and happiest minds, a virtue and felicity to be understood as referring solely to the intellectual sphere. That is, there is no activity so pleasurable as production, or, by consequence, anything so intolerable as restraint.

The history of European literature for the half-century following the fall of Napoleon is, therefore, in the main, that of a force enlisted to contend with the Governments and the various sinister interests which strove to ignore the Revolution and restore the state of affairs which had existed in the eighteenth century. Many illustrious

authors, no doubt, especially in England, more or less favoured this tendency, but their literary practice was commonly inconsistent with their political principles. Scott, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Chateaubriand, might be reactionary as politicians, but in the literary sphere they were innovators and iconoclasts. The study of their writings could not but engender a habit of mind entirely inconsistent with the deference to authority required for the perpetuation of the ancient régime in State and Church. No man, for example, more sincerely deplored the tendencies of his times than Niebuhr, but he should have thought of them before he meddled with the history of Rome. By proving its legendary character, he had done more to unsettle allegiance to tradition than could have been accomplished by the wit and malice of a hundred Heines. We are thus justified in regarding the literature of the nineteenth century as in the main a great liberating force, and in the long-run favourable to sound conservatism also, since it aimed at procuring that liberty for the human spirit without which renovation was as impossible as demolition.

If there was any country in Europe where literature might be expected to be unequivocally on the side of Liberty, it was Italy; for Italy alone had to reckon with foreign as well as domestic oppressors. In fact, the general tendency of Italian literature during the period under review is more uniformly liberal than that of any other; but at the same time its expression is more restrained than that of any other, for the conclusive reason that an Italian writer could only obtain liberty of speech at the price of exile. Love of country is, nevertheless, the dominant thought, which colours it throughout as the soil colours the flower. The men of greatest

genius and most prominent association with the national movement have been treated of in previous chapters, but the host of distinguished if less illustrious authors who must be briefly reviewed in this, was not less animated with patriotic feeling, and this pervading spirit imparts to the Italian literature of the period unity and dignity, and entitles it to a higher place in the general history of literature than could have been procured for it by the mere ability of its representatives.

One apparent exception to this generally liberal and patriotic tendency is not really an exception. The New Catholic reaction which was a necessary consequence of the Revolution, whatever it may have been among the priesthood and the less cultivated classes, was neither illiberal nor unpatriotic among men of letters. Many of the most eminent of these were fervent Catholics, and as such felt themselves in a strait between the claims of religion and of country. As the head of the Church, the Pope was entitled to the profoundest veneration, but as temporal prince, he was as much supported by Austrian bayonets as any of the rest. Could he be promoted from this undignified position to that of spiritual King of Italy by the union of all Italian states into a confederacy under his auspices? This project, if Utopian, was yet natural, generous, and in no respect inconsistent with true patriotic feeling. It broke down from the demonstration furnished by the course of events of the incompatibility of Italian confederacy with Italian unity, but, by the exertions of its opponents, no less than those of its supporters, it left deep traces upon literature.

This idea was the especial property of Vincenzo Gioberti, already mentioned among the men to whom Italian regeneration owes most. Its very fallacy was a

powerful aid to the popular cause, for it conciliated many who would have shrunk from openly assailing the Pope's secular authority, while at the same time it was not so obviously unsound as to be incapable of being maintained in good faith until refuted by the course of events. Although, nevertheless, Gioberti's essay on Italy's spiritual and intellectual primacy is the most important of his works, it almost disappears in the mass of the remainder, treating for the most part of religion, or of moral or speculative philosophy. Among them was a violent attack on the writings of the most eminent Italian philosopher of the age, ANTONIO ROSMINI-SERBATI (1797–1855), who in turn accused Gioberti of pantheism. The great purpose of Rosmini's philosophy may be defined to be the perfecting of St. Thomas Aquinas's system by expelling the element it had derived from Aristotle, which in Rosmini's view led direct to pantheism and materialism. He laboured hard at this object all his life, but died before his work was done. It says much for his genius that one so encumbered with childish ultramontane notions should have won the acknowledged rank he holds among the first philosophical thinkers. He is equally well known as the founder of a religious Order, the constant antagonist of the Jesuits, and the author of the *Five Wounds of the Church*, an appeal for reform whose honest frankness was used by his enemies to deprive him of the cardinal's hat that had been promised him. His Order still flourishes, his system is still potent, and his memory, honoured everywhere, is almost adored in his native place, Roveredo in the Italian Tyrol.

Another philosopher influential on Italian thought was GIOVANNI DOMENICO ROMAGNOSI (1761–1835), whose

importance chiefly consists in his application of philosophy to legal and political science, and his clear prevision of the coming deliverance of Italy.

No Italian of his age, perhaps, was more thoroughly admirable in every respect than TERENZIO MAMIANI (1799–1885), an approved patriot, a wise statesman, a sound and sober thinker in religion and philosophy, an elegant poet, and a man excellent in every relation of life. With more angularity of character, he would, perhaps, have possessed more creative force, and impressed himself more powerfully on the imagination. The dignified eloquence of his meditative poetry, usually in blank verse, and of his discourses, political or academical, is often very impressive, but the form seems more remarkable than the substance. Like most of the best Italians of his day, he spent his youth in exile, his prime in office, and his old age in study and composition. A good selection from his voluminous writings has been published with a memoir by Giovanni Mestica, the editor of Petrarch.

A connecting link between the thinkers and the historians is formed by GIUSEPPE FERRARI (1812–1872). A disciple of Romagnosi, he imported abstract ideas into his survey of the revolutions of Italy since the downfall of the Roman Empire — a very readable if not always a very convincing book. Ferrari was also a distinguished publicist, and an indefatigable pamphleteer in the cause of his country.

History has been extensively cultivated in Italy during the nineteenth century; and although many histories were but popular compendiums, or magnified party pamphlets, or mere *mémoires pour servir*, others have gained for the writers honourable rank among first-class

historians. The most extensive in scale and imposing in subject are histories by CARLO BOTTA (1766–1837) of the American War of Independence and of Italy from 1789 to 1814. The former is the best history of the subject out of the United States; the latter, though taxed with partiality, is a great and invaluable work. His continuation of Guicciardini is of less account. Botta's style is severe and dignified; too archaic in diction, and occasionally deficient in flexibility, but he always writes with the consciousness of his mission which becomes the historian. He was a determined enemy of the romantic school. A Piedmontese by birth, he had been concerned in the disturbances of the early revolutionary period, and had made several campaigns in the capacity of an army surgeon. Become temporarily a Frenchman by the annexation of Piedmont to France, he had held office under Napoleon, whom he displeased by his frankness. After Napoleon's fall he lived chiefly in France. Though always a patriot as regarded the independence of Italy, the melancholy deceptions of revolutionary times led him at last to deem his countrymen only fit for an enlightened despotism.

A stancher liberal was PIETRO COLLETTA (1770–1831) and an even more eminent historian. A Neapolitan officer of engineers, he served under Murat, but was, nevertheless, maintained in his rank by the restored Bourbons. He was Minister of War under the Constitutional Government of 1820, and after its overthrow was for some time imprisoned at Brunn in Austria, where his health suffered greatly. Upon his release he settled at Florence, and devoted himself to writing the history of Naples from the accession of the Bourbon dynasty in 1734 up to 1825. He was wholly inexperienced as an

author, but succeeded in imparting classic form to his work by dint of infinite labour and careful imitation of Tacitus, for which the imperious brevity natural to him, intensified by the habits of military life, admirably qualified him. His work is one of the most marrowy and sinewy of histories, and is especially valuable where he speaks as an eye-witness. It deals fully with financial and economical as well as political and military affairs.

Another excellent historian has been almost lost to Italy by the circumstances attending the publication of his book. GIOVANNI BATTISTA TESTA, an exile in England, published in 1853 his history of the Lombard League, at Doncaster, a place better affected to the horse of Neptune than to the olive of Pallas, and, thus producing *invita Minerva*, has been almost ignored. In fact, he is an admirable historian, lucid and delightful in his narrative, and his style is so fashioned upon the purest models, that he might seem to have come straight out of the sixteenth century. This might be reprehended as affectation, but the objection, if in any respect well founded, has no application to the excellent English version (1877), a book which cannot be too strongly recommended to historians desirous of acquiring the pregnant brevity so essential in this age of multiplication of books to all who would catch and retain the ear of posterity.

The friend and biographer of Manzoni, and imitator of his style in a successful novel, *Margherita Pusterla*, CESARE CANTÙ was a long-lived and industrious, and consequently a voluminous author. His position is well marked as almost the only considerable writer of his time who favoured political and ecclesiastical reaction, and the resulting unpopularity has led him to be

unjustly depreciated as a man of letters; he is always interesting, always individual, and his principal works, the *History of Italy from* 1750 *to* 1850 and his *History of Italian Heretics*, though disfigured by party spirit, are important books. The latter is still the standard authority on the subject, though it will hardly be allowed to continue so.

An unique position among Italian historians is occupied by MICHELE AMARI (1805–89), the Orientalist and national historian of Sicily. Detesting the Neapolitan oppression of his native island, he took up the investigation of the Sicilian Vespers, and depicted this great event as not the consequence of a conspiracy subtly organised by John of Procida, but as a spontaneous uprising against intolerable oppression. The allusion did not escape the Neapolitan Government, and Amari found it expedient to withdraw to Paris, where he studied Arabic as a preparation for his yet more important *History of Sicily under Moslem Dominion*, published between 1854 and 1872. In the interim he had taken part in the Sicilian insurrection, and after the final expulsion of the Bourbons, was successively Minister of Public Instruction and professor of Arabic at Florence, continuing to write and edit books on his favourite subjects. No historian has a higher reputation for erudition and sagacity.

GIUSEPPE MICALI (1780–1844) devoted himself to a subject even more difficult than Amari's, and one incapable of an authoritative solution of its numberless problems. His *Storia degli Antichi Popoli Italiani* is nevertheless a highly important work, which exploded much error, if it did not establish much truth.

A Neapolitan, CARLO TROYA (1784–1858) was to have

written the History of Italy in the Middle Ages from 476 to 1321, which by his method of working might have required forty volumes, but he only arrived at Charlemagne and only filled sixteen. The book is, as Settembrini remarks, a thesaurus rather than a history, but cannot be opened without encountering valuable information and judicious criticism. Troya loved the Middle Age without idolising it; his liberal opinions, much against his will, made the indefatigable bookworm a Minister under one of the ephemeral Neapolitan constitutions, and there was sense as well as wit in the reply of the restored Ferdinand when advised to arrest him: "No! leave him in the Middle Ages!"

Three distinguished statesmen of the nineteenth century, Cesare Balbo, Gino Capponi, and Luigi Carlo Farini, respectively wrote histories of much worth; Balbo an abridged history of Italy, and Capponi one of the Florentine republic, while Farini chronicled the transactions of the States of the Church from 1814 to 1850. Farini's is the most important and authoritative of these works, as he has made the field entirely his own. Balbo and Capponi, however, patricians and men of wealth, did even more for historical studies by their encouragement and pecuniary assistance than by their own writings. The great Ministers, Cavour, Ricasoli, and Minghetti claim a place in literary history as orators and pamphleteers.

For some reason difficult to understand, biography has not of late flourished in Italy. No country is so much overrun with little ephemeral memoirs of little ephemeral people, and there are many extremely valuable studies of particular episodes in the lives of celebrated men, of scientific rather than literary merit. The

very important works of Villari, Pasolini, and Solerti belong to a later period than that now under review, which possesses only two biographies of decided literary pretensions, both autobiographic.

So important was the public career of MASSIMO D'AZEGLIO (1798–1866), a fervent patriot, but also a prudent statesman, for nobility of character second to no contemporary, that his memoirs might have been expected to have been very serious. On the contrary, they are eminently lively and gay, in part, perhaps, from their terminating at the beginning of 1846, before the author's heaviest cares had come upon him. GIUSEPPE MONTANELLI (1813–62), one of the triumvirs in the inauspicious Tuscan revolution of 1849, though equally honest, was entirely deficient in the ballast that steadied D'Azeglio. But his very levity and inconstancy lend vivacity to his memoirs of the Tuscan affairs of his time, and the paradoxes of his character, faithfully depicted by himself, make a striking and memorable portrait. His style is unequal, but excellent when at its best.

NICCOLO TOMMASEO, a Dalmatian (1802–74) forms a connecting link between history and *belles-lettres*. With marvellous versatility he essayed history, politics, moral and speculative philosophy, biography, philology, criticism and poetry, distinguishing himself in all without producing great or enduring work in any. His greatest distinction, perhaps, was attained as an Italian grammarian and lexicographer; but as a critic he wielded great authority, and powerfully contributed to the development of literature. He was essentially the man of his own times, and seemed to resume their various aspects in himself, a sound Catholic and an ardent

liberal ; a classicist and a romanticist ; a conservative and an innovator ; impetuous yet moderate in his aims ; frequently inconsistent with himself, yet ever controlled by an austere sense of duty ; a fine and even brilliant writer, who yet could achieve no durable work. His account of his exile at Corfu, nevertheless, deserves to live for its style, although the theme is insufficient. Tommaseo was a man of marked character, disinterested, independent and impracticable ; rejecting the public honours which he had well earned by his share in the defence of Venice, he spent his later years at Florence, where, although totally blind, he worked indomitably to the last. He should be endeared to England as the author of the fine inscription placed upon the house of Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

The history of Italian poetry during the post-Napoleonic era, after deducting the great names of Leopardi and Giusti, is in the main the history of the romantic school. It has been remarked that this school is not congenial to the Italian genius, and that its temporary prevalence could only occur through the decay of the classical tradition and the inevitable reaction from the excesses of the Revolution. It was further prejudiced in Italian eyes by the ecclesiastical colouring which it could not help assuming. Most of the literary youth of Italy, though they might not be bad Catholics, were still better patriots, and although their compositions might be influenced by Scott and Goethe, were utterly averse to the mediæval development which the romantic idea was receiving in France and Germany. This was particularly the case with the first poet of eminence who imbibed romantic feeling from Manzoni and broke entirely with the already attenuated classicism of Monti

and Foscolo. GIOVANNI BERCHET (1783–1851), although of French descent, was a devoted Italian patriot, whose first works of importance were published in London, where he had been obliged to seek refuge. He began by denouncing the conduct of the English Government towards the people of Parga, and followed this up by a succession of stirring ballads, mostly of patriotic tendency, and a longer poem, *Fantasie*, a vision of the past glories of the Lombard League. In style these poems resemble the romantic poetry of Germany and England, without a vestige of classical influence, but also with no trace of the worship of the past, except as an example to the present, or anything of the mystic spirit of genuine romanticism. Well timed as they were, their effect was extraordinary; but whether antique or contemporary in subject, they were essentially poems of the day, and such poetry cannot continue to be read unless it attains the level of Manzoni's ode on the death of Napoleon and Tennyson's on the death of Wellington. This Berchet knew. "My aim was not," he said on one occasion, "to write a fine poem, but to perform a fine action." His style is consequently defective; his poetry was not written to be criticised, but to inspire and inflame, and fully answered its purpose. "He has found," says Settembrini, "all the maledictions that can possibly be hurled against the foreigner." Upon Charles Albert's conversion to the national cause, Berchet returned to Italy, and died a member of the Sardinian Parliament, universally honoured and beloved, nor will his countrymeu forget him.

"Accursed," adds Settembrini, "be the Italian who forgets GABRIELE ROSSETTI." Rossetti (1785–1854) assuredly will not be forgotten by England, for which

he has done what no other inhabitant of these isles ever did in begetting two great poets. His claims to the gratitude of his countrymen are of quite another sort, resting chiefly upon the spirit and fluency of his political poems, which helped to keep the flame of patriotism alive at home, while the exiled author was teaching Italian at King's College. His life is well known as an appendage to the biography of his more celebrated son. It is one of the most interesting speculations imaginable what kind of poetry Dante Gabriel Rossetti would have written if he had been born and brought up in Italy; certain it is that no prefigurement of his singular alliance of purity and transparency of feeling with intricacy of thought and opulence of illustration, or of his objectivity and marvellous pictorial gift, is to be found in his father's simple, natural, rather overfluent verse. The elder Rossetti may, nevertheless, be ranked among the poets of the romantic school; and a similar place belongs to the amiable Luigi Carrer (1801–53) on account of his ballads, the most successful of his works. Francesco dall' Ongaro, a good lyric poet in other departments, applied the popular *stornello* to the purposes of patriotic poetry with eminent success.

Two poets of more importance enjoyed for a time great renown, but their reputation, without becoming extinct, has considerably declined. GIOVANNI PRATI (1815–54), a native of the Italian Tyrol, gained great reputation in 1841 by a narrative poem in blank verse, *Edmenegarda*, founded upon a tragic event in the family of the great Venetian patriot Daniele Manin. It is a poor apology for adultery, but in sentimentality, though not in morality, belongs to the school of Lamartine, whose *Jocelyn* was then at the meridian of its celebrity.

In consequence, notwithstanding much real poetical merit, it bears that fatal impress of the boudoir which disfigures so much of the best pictorial as well as poetical work of the time. Its success encouraged Prati to produce several volumes of lyrics, spirited, melodious, but too fluent. His facility, like Monti's, approached the faculty of improvisation, but Monti's tawny torrent has shrunk in Prati into a silver rill, equally swift but by no means equally majestic. He is nevertheless a poet, and in a particular manner the poet of the brief interval of hope and joy which accompanied the uprising of 1848. The national feeling of the time remains embodied in these verses, the most permanently valuable of his writings; for the more imaginative and ambitious productions of his later years, such as *Satana e le Grazie* or *Armando*, though interesting, belong to the fundamentally unsound *genre* of adaptation from *Faust*.

Another poet once in the enjoyment of a popularity which he has failed to retain is ALEARDO ALEARDI (1812–78). He has too much elegance and feeling to be forgotten, but wants force; his general attitude seems not inaccurately indicated in his own description of his heroine Arnalda da Roca as she appeared in the act of blowing up a shipload of Turks:

"Placidamente *fulminò la palla*."

The expression is rarely at the height of the sentiment to be expressed. If this can be overlooked, the reader who does not wish his emotions to run away with him may find much to admire in the languid grace of the poems, generally descriptive, didactic or idyllic, which form the most important part of Aleardi's work. It is

rather a reproach than an honour to his patriotic lyrics that their strong point should be not eloquence but description, which is always excellent.

The reputation of the good priest and good patriot, GIACOMO ZANELLA (1820–89), has, on the contrary, gone on increasing, and with justice, for his verse is usually at the level of his thought, and his thought, if more frequently graceful than striking, sometimes attains a commanding elevation, as in his odes to Dante and on the opening of the Suez Canal. His *Psyche* and *Egoism and Charity* are clearly and exquisitely cut as Greek gems. Zanella's speciality, however, is his effort to ally science with poetry, and though he cannot always prevail upon them to shake hands, one of his lyrics of this character, *The Vigil*, a meditation upon Evolution from a theologian's point of view, is perhaps his masterpiece. Another very striking poem is the colloquy between Milton and Galileo, in which Galileo's dread of the sceptical tendency of the science to which he has imparted such an impulse is represented as determining Milton "to justify the ways of God to man." Zanella, a native of the Vicenzan district, was a gentle, tender, melancholy man, not unlike Cowper, and his reason, under the stress of domestic affliction, at one time seemed in danger of suffering the same eclipse. Recovering, he forsook the career of college professor for a cottage near Vicenza, where:

> "*Dopo sparsi al vento*
> *Tanti sogni superbi e tanto foco*
> *Di poesia dagl' anni inerti spento,*
> *Voluntario romito in questo loco,*
> *Tra pochi arbori e fior vivo contento.*"

This retirement, nevertheless, produced some of

Zanella's most delicate poetry, comprised in his dainty little volume *Astichello ed altre Poesie*, not yet included in his works. One of the most beautiful of his poems, *The Redbreast* (*Il Pettirostro*), marvellously resembles the idylls of Coleridge, with whose works Zanella betrays his acquaintance. Charming, also, are the sonnets celebrating the various aspects of the local river, the little Astichello, such as this upon the sympathy between man and Nature in time of drought, a "pathetic fallacy," perhaps, but none the worse for that :—

> "*Shrunk to a thread, the dwindling waters stray*
> *Where Astichello 'neath the poplar flows*
> *With languid tide that scarce avails to sway*
> *The moss that nigh the midmost channel grows.*
>
> *Sirius the while, ablaze with fiery ray,*
> *Above the unsheltered meadow throbs and glows;*
> *And all the blithe fecundity of May*
> *One withering waste of dismal yellow shows.*
>
> *The peasant groans despair, and shakes his head;*
> *The friendly stream, munificent no more,*
> *Barred from the brink it lately overran,*
> *Like rustic met with rustic to deplore*
> *The common ill, wails feebly from its bed,*
> *Mingling its music with the plaint of man.*"

Zanella might have applied to himself the proud humility of Musset, *Mon verre n'est pas grand, mais je bois dans mon verre.* His modest strain was independent of traditional or contemporary influence. The other poets of the time are more historically significant as representing the decadence of the romantic school. A new development was urgently required to make good its exhausted vitality. The problem was solved much in the same way as that of the renovation of the operatic

stage, left void by the once brilliant but now moribund school of Rossini, save that in that instance the evening star of the old dispensation was also the morning star of the new. No such Janus-Verdi arose upon poetry, but the man for the occasion was found in the principal figure of our next chapter, Giosuè Carducci.

The drama of the period has only one eminent representative, PIETRO COSSA (1830–80), and his works, strictly speaking, fall somewhat later. Cossa, though fine both in versification and rhetoric, is essentially more of a playwright than of a poet, but half redeems his deficiencies by a quality not too common on the tragic stage of our day, masculine strength. Almost every scene is powerful, the action rarely halts or lingers, there is never any room for doubt as to the author's intention, and the language is energetic without bombast. Cossa's shortcomings are mainly in the higher region of art. He has little creative power, and although he is occasionally felicitous in the invention of a minor character, he rarely ventures to travel beyond the record in the delineation of the historical personages who form the most important portion of his dramatic flock. There is no penetration, no subtlety, nothing to manifest endowment with any insight beyond the ordinary. As conventional representations, however, Cossa's characters are brilliant, and he may even be accused of excess in the accumulation of historical traits, as though he could not bear to part with an anecdote. *Nero, Messalina, Cola di Rienzo, The Borgias, Cleopatra, Julian the Apostate* are among the most remarkable of his numerous historical tragedies; if not great plays or dramatic poems, they are, at all events, very splendid historical masquerades. There is more originality in

his one comedy, *Plautus and his Age*, a lively picture of Roman society in Plautus's time.

The period immediately preceding the establishment of Italian unity brought forth many novels, mostly of the Manzonian school. The most important of these have been already mentioned. FRANCESCO DOMENICO GUERAZZI (1804–73), of infelicitous memory as a politician, had sufficient force as an historical novelist to deviate from the Manzonian model, and to obtain for a while an European reputation with his *Battle of Benevento*, *Siege of Florence*, and *Pasquale Paoli*. He was a man of powerful but unregulated character, and the inequality extends to his writings; his diction is extolled, his style condemned. Italian fiction had a serious loss in Ippolito Nievo, drowned on his return from Garibaldi's expedition to Sicily. "Perhaps," says Vernon Lee, "no better picture could be given of Italy in the last years of the eighteenth century than that contained in Nievo's *Confessioni di un Ottuagenario*."

The literary period which we have been traversing in the last two chapters may be approximately described as that extending from the fall of Napoleon the First (1814) to the intervention of Napoleon the Third in Italian politics (1859). It saw the later works of Monti and Foscolo, all the chief productions of Manzoni, and everything of Leopardi's. Apart from these, it produced no great genius, but a number of highly distinguished writers who did honour to their own literature without producing any marked effect upon the literatures of foreign nations. The main reason of this circumscription of Italian influence was the legitimate preoccupation of Italy with her own affairs. The main aspiration of every Italian breast was the expulsion of the foreigner and the

constitution of the national unity, whether as monarchy, federation, or republic. This common thought gave a noble unity to the authorship of the period, but could not materially affect contemporary literatures, although Mazzini's English writings, Mr. Gladstone's Neapolitan pamphlets, Sydney Dobell's *Roman*, Mrs. Browning's *Casa Guidi Windows* and *Poems before Congress*, and divers poems of Robert Browning, and Algernon Swinburne, and Dante Rossetti, show that England was not uninfluenced by it. In the next generation, Italian letters, though, except for the poets Carducci and D'Annunzio, rather retrograding than advancing in merit, became more influential by becoming more cosmopolitan.

CHAPTER XXVI

CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN LITERATURE

THE present age of letters in Italy resembles its contemporary literary epochs in the one respect in which these agree among themselves and differ from most preceding ages; it is an age of literary anarchy. No standard of taste exists to which it is deemed essential to conform, and antipathetic schools flourish comfortably, if not always peaceably, side by side. This was the case with the Greek schools of philosophy under the Roman Empire, but in literature has rarely happened before the nineteenth century. At almost all former periods some prevailing canon of taste has stamped the literary productions of the era with its own signet, and the most celebrated authors of the day have legislated for the rest. The Goethes, the Victor Hugos, the Tennysons of our time, while powerfully affecting contemporary thought, have failed to thus impress their image and superscription on contemporary style. Scepticism which at former periods would have horrified the coævals of Pope or Bembo, is audaciously professed with regard to the merits of greater men; and whereas, in former ages, admiration meant imitation, some of the sincerest votaries of a Hugo or a Browning would be farthest from attempting to reproduce their mannerisms. It is quite true that the endeavour is still sometimes made to

erect individual tastes and distastes into articles of faith, that we are confidently told that such a writer or such a form of art is hopelessly antiquated, and that such another is accepted by the right-minded. But this dogmatism is invariably an expression of individual taste, and has no real substance and no permanence. The change cannot but be salutary if, as we believe, it is in the main an effect of the expansion of the area of knowledge. The class of intelligent readers is now so greatly enlarged that the legislation of academies and the verdict of coteries reach comparatively but a little way; readers think for themselves more than they did of old; and if the public taste is less disciplined than formerly, it is in less danger of being biassed in one direction. It may be added that the armistice between the classic and romantic schools, consequent upon the proved inability of each to subdue the other, has demonstrated the impossibility of any infallible æsthetic criterion. Men disputed what this criterion might be, and different conceptions of it prevailed in different ages, but the existence of some definite standard entitled to exact conformity was questioned by none. Now it is generally recognised that men are born classicists or romanticists, as they have been said to be born Platonists or Aristotelians, and that the right course for every author is to cultivate his powers in whatsoever direction Nature has assigned to them, and for every reader to strive to appreciate excellence whencesoever it comes. The result is life, spirit, energy, but a commotion as of tossing billows, which may or may not eventually settle down into the calm of an accepted theory of art.

We cannot speak in Italy more than elsewhere of any

great writer as ruling his age and prescribing laws to his contemporaries. Individual genius, however, is no less effective than of old upon those constitutionally in sympathy with it, and no gifted writer can introduce a new style without enlisting disciples and provoking antagonists. Such a genius and such a style appertain to GIOSUÈ CARDUCCI (born 1836), the one contemporary poet of Italy who, if we except Gabriele d'Annunzio, "in shape and gesture proudly eminent," stands forth like a tower from the rest, and who has made an abiding reputation as the introducer of the new elements needed to replace the expiring impulse of the romantic school. Like many of his compeers, Carducci partakes of both classic and romantic elements; romantic in his revolt against convention, classic in his worship of antique form; and it is in great measure this duality which renders him so important and interesting.

Carducci, far from being the literary dictator of his age, is perhaps not less distasteful to the ultra-realists for whom he paved the way, than to the romanticists whom he overthrew, yet is in a very special sense the representative of his age and nation. The commencement of poetical activity synchronised with a new dispensation in the world of politics. The reviving nation must have a new poet or none. Egypt was plainly unfit to sing the songs of Sion. The submission of Manzoni, the despair of Leopardi, had in their respective ways well suited an age of slavery; but the age of liberty had now arrived, and craved strains combative, resonant, and joyous. The Pope's obstinate clinging to the temporal power also compelled the national poet to be anti-clerical. Neither Carducci's political nor his religious views wanted anything essential to the effectual fulfilment of his mis-

sion: that their vehemence sometimes transgressed the limits of good sense and good taste would probably now be acknowledged by himself. It was equally important that the form should correspond to the feeling. The new spirit sought a new body. Carducci solved the problem in the same manner as Chiabrera would have solved it two centuries and a half before, had Chiabrera's genius equalled his discernment. He perceived that in the circumstances of his day a return to classic models would be no retrogression, but renovation for Italian poetry: unfortunately he had no true insight into the classical spirit. This Carducci possessed, and there are few happier examples of the alliance of one literature with another than the poems, the most important part of his work, in which he has kept classical examples steadily before him. The imitation, it must be understood, is one of form and not of essence; the themes are but occasionally classical, and even when this is the case express the feelings of a modern Italian spirit. Imitate classical forms as the poet may, he is essentially the man of the nineteenth century: his variety of mood and theme is great; his orchestra has a place for every instrument; but in nine cases out of ten the direction to the performer is *con brio*. By this dashing vigour Carducci has poured new blood into the exhausted veins of Italian poetry, and administered an antidote to her besetting maladies by the example of a style condensed, nervous, and terse to a fault. Epic or dramatic power he does not claim: his genius is entirely lyrical.

Carducci's first volume appeared in 1857, and the events of the following years called forth a number of occasional poems, clearly indicating the representa-

tive poet of the people and the time. In 1865, the vigorous "Hymn to Satan" provoked the controversy which the poet had no doubt designed. His Satan, it hardly need be said, is not the monarch of the fallen seraphim, but the spirit of revolt against social and ecclesiastical tyranny, more of a Luther than a Lucifer. *Levia Gravia* (1867) greatly extended the poet's reputation. *Odi Barbare* (1877) excited a literary controversy almost as virulent as the theological. The splendour of the diction was beyond question, but what was to be said to the novel or exotic forms in which the poet had thought fit to clothe it? To us, the naturalisation of the Alcaic and Sapphic metres appears most successful, although in the former the writer has permitted himself some deviation from the Horatian model, and the form is perhaps too deeply impressed with his own personality to become frequent in Italian literature. Most of the other forms, including the hexameters and pentameters, seem to us either too stiff or too intricate to be quite satisfactorily manipulated even by Carducci himself; but the study of them must be a valuable training for practitioners in more facile metres. If the form be sometimes too elaborate, there can be no dispute as to the weight and massive majesty of the sense. Carducci has solved the problem which baffled the Renaissance, of linking strength of thought to artifice of form. The *Rime Nuove* brought him new laurels, and his poetical career has paused for the present with a noble ode on the tercentenary of Tasso in 1895. The jubilee of his connection with the University of Bologna was celebrated by a great demonstration in 1896, and, reconciled with the monarchy which he once opposed, he enjoys the

honour of a Senator of the Kingdom. A Liberal but a Royalist, a freethinker but a theist, he is happily placed to exert a reconciling and moderating influence alike in the political and the intellectual sphere.

The difficulties of translating Carducci's more characteristic poems are almost insuperable. He is not in the least obscure, but his noble and austere form is indissolubly wedded to the sense, and in reproduction his bronze too often becomes plaster. Many versions, moreover, would be required to render justice to the various aspects of his many-sided genius—his love of country, his passion for beautiful form, his Latin and Hellenic enthusiasm, his photographic intensity of descriptive touch, his sympathy for honest labour and uncomplaining poverty, his capacity for caressing affection and scathing indignation. The following poem powerfully exhibits his intense devotion to the past, and faith in the future of his Italy. The subject is the statue of Victory in the Temple of Vespasian at Brescia; but to appreciate the full force of the poem, it must be known that the statue was a recent discovery of happiest augury (1826), and that Brescia had been the scene of an heroic defence and a cruel sack in the uprising against the Austrians in 1848:

"*Hast thou, high Virgin, wings of good augury*
Waved o'er the crouching, targeted phalanxes,
With knee-propt shield and spear protended,
Biding the shock of the hostile onset?

Or hast thou, soaring in front of the eagles,
Led surging swarms of Marsian soldiery,
With blaze of fulgent light the neighing
Parthian steed and his lord appalling?

Thy pinions folded, thy stern foot haughtily
Pressing the casque of foeman unhelmeted;—
Whose fair renown for feat triumphant
Art on the orb of thy shield inscribing?

An archon's name, who boldly in face of Wrong
The freeman's law upheld and immunity?
A consul's, far and wide the Latin
Limit and glory and awe enlarging?

Thee throned on Alpine pinnacle loftily,
Radiant 'mid tempest, heralding might I hear,
Kings and peoples, here stands Italy,
Weaponed to strike for her soil and honour.

Lydia, the while, a garland of flowerets,
By sad October strewn o'er the wreck of Rome,
To deck thee braids, and gently bending,
Questioneth, as at thy foot she lays it:

'What thoughts, what visions, Victory, came to thee,
Years on years in the humid imprisonment
Of earth immured? the German horses
Heardest thou stamp o'er thy brow Hellenic?'

'I heard,' she answers, flashing and fulminant,
'Heard and endured, for glory of Greece am I,
And strength of Rome, in bronze immortal
Sped without flaw through the fleeting ages.

'The ages passed like the twelve birds ominous,
Descried by gaze of Romulus anciently:
They passed, I rose: thy Gods, proclaiming,
Italy, see! and thy buried heroes.

'Proud of her fortune, Brescia enshrinèd me,
Brescia the stalwart, Brescia the iron-girt,
Italia's lioness, her vesture
Dyed in the blood of her land's invaders.'"

A large proportion of Carducci's lyrics flow with more of liquid ease in more familiar metres, better adapted for

popularity. This is especially the case with his impassioned addresses to the dead or to contemporaries who have won his admiration, and the poems which depict ordinary life, such as "A Dream in Summer," "On a Saint Peter's Eve," and "The Mother," whose apparently loose but really well-knit texture is admirably reproduced by his American translator Mr. Sewall, and which are such pieces as Walt Whitman might have written if he had been a poet in virtue of his art as well as of his nature. Perhaps none of the shorter pieces is more expressive of his profound humanity than his apotheosis of patient toil under the figure of "The Ox," ably rendered by Mr. Sewall, a poem Egyptian in its grave massiveness and tranquil repose:

"*I love thee, pious Ox; a gentle feeling*
Of vigour and of peace thou giv'st my heart.
How solemn, like a monument, thou art!
Over wide fertile fields thy calm gaze stealing!
Unto the yoke with grave contentment kneeling,
To man's quick work thou dost thy strength impart:
He shouts and goads, and, answering thy smart,
Thou turn'st on him thy patient eyes appealing.

From thy broad nostrils, black and wet, arise
Thy breath's soft fumes; and on the still air swells,
Like happy hymn, thy lowing's mellow strain.
In the grave sweetness of thy tranquil eyes
Of emerald, broad and still reflected, dwells
All the divine green silence of the plain."

Carducci has rendered his country much service as a literary critic, especially of the Renaissance, and of the Risorgimento of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He is not subtle or profound, but puts forth unanswerably propositions dictated by the soundest common-sense. There is something Teutonic as well as Italian

in his composition, and he recalls no precursor so much as the German poet Platen, an equal master of form; but Platen, though a real patriot, is more at home with any nation than his own. It is a chief glory of Carducci to have united an intensely patriotic spirit to a comprehensive cosmopolitanism. Though ranging far and wide to enrich the domestic literature with new metrical forms, he loves those in which the Italian genius has embodied itself from days of old, and is always ready to defend them against degenerate countrymen, no less than against unappreciative foreigners. Like Wordsworth, he has simultaneously vindicated and illustrated the sonnet:

> "*Brief strain with much in little rife; whose tone,*
> *As worlds untrodden rose upon his thought,*
> *Dante touched lightly; that Petrarca sought,*
> *Flower among flowers by gliding waters grown;*
> *That from trump epical of Tasso blown*
> *Pealed through his prison; that wert gravely fraught*
> *With voice austere by him who marble fought*
> *To free the spirit he divined in stone:—*
>
> *To Æschylus new-born by Avon's shore*
> *Thou camest harbinger of Art, to be*
> *A hidden cell for hidden sorrow's store;*
> *On thee smiled Milton and Camoens; thee,*
> *His rout of lines unleashing with a roar,*
> *Bavius blasphemes; the dearer thence to me.*"

Carducci's example could not but create a school of poets, many of great merit, but most of whom stand to him more or less in the relation of disciples to a master. The chief exception is the only one who can claim, like Timotheus, to "divide the crown," GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO.

D'Annunzio (born 1863) is a second Marini, endowed

with an even more brilliant genius, and better armed against besetting faults. It is terrible to think what synchronism with Marini might have made of him, but it has been his good fortune to have had Carducci's example before his eyes, and his merit to have profited by it. At the same time his genius is so distinct from Carducci's as to vindicate for him an independent position. To employ Coventry Patmore's happy application of a passage in Zephaniah to the poetic art, D'Annunzio rather represents "Beauty," and Carducci "Bands"; the note of the one is restraint, and that of the other is exuberance. D'Annunzio's verse is not cast in bronze like Carducci's, nor has he his rival's splendid virility or his devotion to ideal interests; his affluence is nevertheless so well restrained by a natural instinct for form that it never, as with Marini, becomes riotous extravagance. Some of the metrical forms, indeed, which, influenced as may be surmised by Mr. Swinburne, he has endeavoured to introduce, seem ill adapted to the genius of the Italian language, though they would probably succeed well in English. But nothing can be more satisfactory than the form of his sonnets or of his ballad-romances, and he has enriched Italian poetry with one new form of great beauty, the *rima nona*, a happy compromise between the terse purity of the national octave and the rich harmony, like the chiming of many waters, of the English Spenserian stanza, which no foreign literature has yet succeeded in acclimatising. It is also to his honour that, while no writer is more partial to the employment of unusual words, commonly derived from science or natural history, the effect is that of brilliant mosaic without a mosaic's rigidity, but soft and liquid as a glowing canvas.

In many respects D'Annunzio presents a strong affinity to Keats; but to the innocent sensuousness which rejoices in the reproduction of sumptuous beauty, he adds that which purposely ministers to voluptuousness. This might be forgiven as the failing of a youthful and ardent poet, and becomes, indeed, much less obtrusive in his later poetical writings. The misfortune is that nothing seems to be taking its place. Had years brought D'Annunzio "the philosophic mind," had his third volume compared with its predecessors as *Locksley Hall* and *In Memoriam* compare with the *Lotus Eaters*, he would be at the head, not merely of Italian, but of European poets. His most recent productions, while indicating, as must almost inevitably be the case, an impoverishment of the merely sensuous opulence of his youth, manifest but slight advance in power of thought, in dignity of utterance, in human or national sympathies, in anything that discriminates the noon of poetical power from its morning. The *Canto Novo* (1881) and the *Intermezzo* (1883) were a splendid dawn; and *L'Isotteo* (1885) and *La Chimera* (1888) revealed further development, not indeed in power of thought, but in objectivity and in mastery of form. Much of all these volumes is mere voluptuous dreaming, but the pictures of nature are marvellously vivid; such pieces as the little unrhymed lyric of twelve lines, *O falce di luna calante*, reveal the natural magic which is perhaps the rarest endowment of genius; and the melody is such as is only granted to a true poet. In the *Poema Paradisiaco*, the joy of life is evidently on the wane, and, except in a few pieces of exquisite pathos, such as *Consolazione*, seems in danger of being replaced, not by a nobler and more serious theory of life, but by the worst kind of pessimism, that born of mere satiety. The most

recent poems, the *Odi Navali* (1893), though patriotic in theme, appear tame and artificial in comparison with earlier work. The epilogue to the *Poema Paradisiaco*, nevertheless, argues progress in the right direction, and leaves room to hope that D'Annunzio may yet take rank not merely with poets eminent for melody, fancy, and imagination, but with those who have counted among the shaping forces of their time.

The general impression of D'Annunzio's poetry is one of dazzling splendour and intoxicating perfume. The poet seems determined to leave no sense ungratified, and not to omit a hue, an odour, or a cadence that can by any possibility be pressed into his service. It says much for the genuineness of his poetical faculty that he should actually be able to perform this without falling into extravagance ; but although his lavish luxury of phrase and description is kept within the limits of taste, the too uniform splendour satiates and fatigues. Mr. Greene's translations in his Italian Lyrists convey a very good notion of D'Annunzio's most usual manner. The following sonnet may serve as a specimen :—

"*Beneath the white full-moon the murmuring seas*
Send songs of love across the pine-tree glade;
The moonlight filtering through the dome-topped trees
Fills with weird light the vast and secret shade;
A fresh salt perfume on the Illyrian breeze
From sea-weeds on the rock is hither swayed,
While my sad heart, worn out and ill at ease,
A wild poetic longing doth invade.

But now more joyous still the love-songs flow
O'er waves of silver sea; from pine to pine
A sweet name echoes in the winds that blow;
And, hovering through yon spaces diamantine,
A phantom fair with silent flight and slow,
Smiles on me from its great-orbed eyes divine."

At the same time D'Annunzio has another style, principally exhibited in his minor lyrics and his ballad romances, where simple but perfect melody is mated with hearty vigour. The contrast between Tennyson's *Palace of Art* and his *Edward Gray* is hardly greater than that between the brilliant poetical landscape just quoted, and this joyous *aubade* :—

" *While yet the veil of misty dew*
Conceals the morning flush,
(How light of foot the foxes' crew
Are scampering in the bush !)

On damask bed my Clara spends
In dreams the idle hours :
(Warm the wet meadow's breath ascends,
And herbs are sweet as flowers.)

Lift, lovely lady all amort,
The glory of your head.
(The hounds are yelling in the court
Enough to wake the dead.)

Hear'st not the note of merry horn
That calls thee to the chase ?
(In glades of ancient oak and thorn
The deer hath left his trace.)

With manly vesture, trim and tight,
Those budding breasts be bound ;
(I hear thy jennet neigh delight,
And paw the paven ground.)

Soho ! my beauty ! down the stairs
At last ? Aha ! Huzza !
(Red morning o'er the mountain flares.)
To saddle ! and away !"

It is manifest that although the Carduccis and D'Annunzios of the present day may not rank higher as poets than

the Montis and Leopardis of the past, they have done far more to fit the Italian lyre with new strings, and have opened up paths of progress formerly undreamed of. Many of the novel and exotic forms they have introduced will richly repay cultivation, but the problem will be to employ the technique acquired by their practice to the embellishment and elevation of forms more adapted for general use. This the great master of modern Italian poetry has seen, and, magnificently as he has handled the more elaborate harmonies, it is the simple, popular song that he invokes after all, while incomparably exemplifying it :

> "*Cura e onor de' padri miei,*
> *Tu mi sei*
> *Come lor sacra e diletta.*
> *Ave, o rima : e dammi un fiore*
> *Per l'amore,*
> *E per l'odio una saetta.*"

Apart from these two chief names Italy possesses at present a number of excellent lyrical poets. The best known is perhaps Olindo Guerrini, whose first poems, *Posthuma*, supposed to be edited from the papers of an imaginary Lorenzo Stecchetti, caused a great sensation, not so much by their unquestionable talent as by their audacious immorality. Of late years Guerrini has produced a number of poems on the political circumstances of the country, many of which are perfect masterpieces of refined form and energetic expression. As much may be said for the political verses of the Parliamentary orator Felice Cavallotti. The poet of the social revolution is Mario Rapisardi, a Sicilian, known also as the literary antagonist of Carducci ; while the sorrows of the poor are pathetically expressed by a lady, Ada

Negri. Alessandro Arnaboldi, lately deceased, possessed an eminent faculty for description and excelled in grave and dignified lyric, not unlike Matthew Arnold; while Italy has her James Thomson in the gloomy and powerful Arturo Graf. Antonio Fogazzaro, on the other hand, is the poet of hope and faith. Enrico Panzacchi, less individual than most of these, surpasses them all in grace and variety; Edmondo de Amicis, celebrated as a traveller, has the gift of brilliant description; Luigi Capuana has emulated Carducci's metrical experiments; and excellent poetry has been produced by Giovanni Marradi, Giuseppe Pascoli, and Alfredo Baccelli. Translated specimens of these and other poets, with biographical and bibliographical particulars, will be found in Mr. G. A. Greene's *Italian Lyrists of To-Day*. On the whole, the present condition of Italian poetry is one of abundant vitality, but of deficient concentration either in great men or great poems. The serious drama is best represented by Cavallotti's tragedies and the New Testament trilogy of Giuseppe Bovio, and the humorous by the comedies of Roberto Bracco and Giacinto Gallina.

The novel is at present as vigorously cultivated in Italy as in any civilised nation, and the talent it attracts cannot be altogether devoid of results. No talent, however, succeeds in permanently naturalising forms of literature uncongenial to the national mind, and it remains to be seen whether this is or is not the case with the novel in Italy. The novelette arose spontaneously, and was maintained without difficulty; but with every encouragement from the example of other nations, Italy failed to acclimatise either romantic fiction or the novel of manners, until far entered into the nineteenth century. The inference that lengthy story-telling must be alien to the genius

of the people is confirmed by the general inferiority of modern Italian novelists. One or two, such as Matilda Serao, Salvatore Farini, and Giulio Barrili, have acquired a reputation beyond the limits of their own country. One or two others, such as Antonio Fogazzaro, the leader of a reaction towards a spiritualistic conception of things; Carlo Placci, the very promising author of *Un Furto;* and Luciano Zuccoli, author of *Roberta*, have shown the ability to impress themselves upon the national literature.

Only two, however, seem to stand forth very decidedly as masters of fiction. One of them is Gabriele d'Annunzio, already treated as a poet. D'Annunzio's novels have made more noise than his poems, being from one point of view much more, from another much less, suited for general perusal. The scandal which has grown up about them has diverted attention from their real merits of fine style and conscientious workmanship. As an artist, D'Annunzio is almost as admirable in prose as in verse; and if with his descriptive he combined the creative gift, all his immoralities would not debar him from permanent renown. Unfortunately, he is like most French and Italian novelists, monotonously restricted to the portrayal of a single passion, and his splendid scenery is the background for trivial characters. He reminds us of the demon in Victor Hugo's poem, who consumes the strength of lions and the wisdom of elephants in fashioning a locust. This is the besetting sin of the novelists of France and Italy: with a few brilliant exceptions on both sides, the English novel lives by character, the French by situation. D'Annunzio's novels are nevertheless important literary events, and cannot be omitted from any survey of modern European literature.

They have already gained him renown and circulation in France and the United States. The most celebrated are *Il Piacere*, *Il Trionfo della Morte*, *La Vergine delle Rocce*, the last of which is exempt from most of the objections justly urged against the others.

GIOVANNI VERGA (b. 1840) rivals the European reputation of D'Annunzio, and is, like him, the head of a realistic school; but his realism is of quite another sort, owing nothing to Zola or Maupassant. He is the most eminent European representative of the local novel, dealing with the manners, humours, and peculiar circumstances of some special locality. The vogue of this style was perhaps originally due to George Sand's idyllic pictures of Berri. Verga has found a yet more interesting corner of the world to delineate. A Sicilian, though residing at Milan, he has made his native island the scene of his fiction. Centuries of misgovernment have unhappily accumulated stores of tragic material in the people's misery and oppression, and the ferocity and vindictiveness these have engendered. Verga depicts these circumstances with the fidelity of a dispassionate observer and the skill of an artist. His books not only attract in their own day, but will be treasured in the future among the most valuable documents for the social history of Sicily.

Any one of even the minor poets whom we have enumerated has a chance of reaching posterity, for their work is at all events individual, and expressive of the personality of the author. If this is sufficiently interesting, the work may live, though it be far from inaugurating a new literary era like Carducci's. It is otherwise with the contemporary prose literature of Italy. A history, a biography, philology like Ascoli's or D'Ancona's, a work on social science like Sella's or

Morselli's may possess great value as the work of an expert, even though devoid of individuality; but in this case it must sooner or later lapse into the category of books of reference. Such appears to be the case with most of the excellent work now being done in Italy in these and other departments: the statue is carved, but no name is inscribed upon the pedestal, for the sculpture is the work of a craftsman, not of an artist. Exceptions may be made in favour of a few writers recently deceased —Ruggiero Bonghi, translator of Plato and historian of Rome, one of the soundest heads in Italy; Giuseppe Chiarini, champion of Carducci; Enrico Nencioni, lately lost to his country, a high authority upon English literature; Angelo de Gubernatis, a brilliant and almost too versatile critic and philologist; and Giuseppe Guerzoni, raised above himself by his theme when he wrote the life of Garibaldi. Among living men, two at least have won an abiding reputation as writers, apart from the utilitarian worth of their work—Pascale Villari, biographer of Savonarola and Machiavelli, and writer on the social conditions of the South; and Domenico Comparetti, author of *Virgilio nel Medio Evo.* In general, however, the chief distinction of contemporary writers on serious subjects seems to be their general diligence and good sense. Admirable writers have gained European renown for themselves, and exalted the fame of their country by the substantial merit of works making no especial pretension to literary distinction. Thus Ascoli stands high in general philology; D'Ancona, Tigri, and Rubieri in literary history; Lanciani and Rossi in archæology; Nitti in historical research; Pasolini and Solerti in biography; Cremona in mathematics; Lombroso and Ferrero in psychology; and Cossa in political economy.

These form a galaxy indeed, but belong rather to learning and science than to literature. This temporary languor of pure literature may perhaps be accounted for when it is considered that one main factor of inspiration has been removed by the contentment of the national aspirations. The subjection and oppression of the country, with all their evils, at all events afforded an intense stimulus to literary genius. Every Italian heart was possessed by the emotions most conducive to impassioned composition; and patriotic sentiment, even when not expressed in words, imbued the whole of literature. The tension removed, it was perhaps inevitable that overstrained feelings should decline to a lower level, which may be suddenly elevated by the occurrence of some great national crisis, or the appearance of some genius gifted, like Mazzini and Carducci, with an especial power of influencing the young. What Italian letters seem to want above all things is men, other than poets and novelists, capable of impressing their own individuality on what they write, and such men are most readily formed either by the agitation of stirring times, or by the contagious enthusiasm caught from a great teacher.

The opinions of many eminent living men of letters on the future of their country's literature have been collected by Signor Ugo Ojetti in his *Alla scoperta dei Letterati* (1895). They are not in general of a very encouraging character, but their weight is considerably impaired by their almost complete restriction to a single branch of literature, and that one whose preponderance is by no means to be desired. Almost all the authors interviewed by Signor Ojetti are novelists, and, so far as appears from his reports, would appear utterly unconscious of the

existence of any class of literature but fiction, poetry, and the drama. They seem to regard literature and *belles lettres* as convertible terms, and take no notice of the wider and more important domains of history, biography, philosophy, moral and economic science, which may be and often have been in the most flourishing condition while *belles lettres* languish. It is, indeed, much to be wished that more of the literary talent of Italy were directed to solid and permanent work, and less to fiction, which must be ephemeral in proportion to the very fidelity with which it fulfils its ordinary task of depicting the manners of the day. Work like Comparetti's *Virgilio nel Medio Evo*, for example, confers higher distinction on the national literature than any number of novels, unless when creations of genius of a high order.

Such genius, when exercised in fiction or in poetry, does not depend for its manifestation upon the state of the book market; the really gifted author obeys an impulse from within. "Genius does what it must, and talent does what it can." If modern Italians have it in them to produce great books, they will not be prevented by such of the obstacles stated by Signor Ojetti's confabulators as may be fairly resolved into one, the insufficient remuneration of literary work. It is just to acknowledge, however, the existence of impediments of another kind. From the earliest period of letters Italy has suffered from the variance of the written and the spoken language. The refinements of cultivated circles at Rome were not accepted in the provinces: there was a Latin of books and a Latin of ordinary life. In process of time the former became the exclusive speech of the learned, while the language of the vulgar gave birth to a number of dialects, out of

which, when a vernacular literature came to exist, the Tuscan was selected as the most appropriate for written speech. Hence there has always been something artificial in Italian literary language. Many of the most gifted authors who happened to be born out of Tuscany never attained to write it with perfect correctness; and the jealous care taken to ensure its purity tended to limit its flexibility and compass. It thus became hardly adequate to deal with the mass of neologism absolutely forced upon it by the development of modern civilisation.

"The difficulty," says Symonds, "under which a mother-tongue, artificially and critically fashioned like Italian, suffers when it copes with ordinary affairs of modern life, is illustrated by the formation of feeble vocables, and by newspaper jargon," of which he gives a horrible instance. The same critic wrote in 1877: "Italian has undergone no process of transformation and regeneration according to the laws of organic growth since it first started. The different districts still use different dialects, while writers in all parts of the peninsula have conformed their style, as far as possible, to early Tuscan models. It may be questioned whether united Italy, having for the first time gained the necessary conditions of national concentration, is not now at last about to enter on a new phase of growth in literature, which, after many years, will make the style of the first authors more archaic than it seems at present." The immense difficulty experienced by so great a writer as Manzoni in reconciling vigour with purity of diction, and his complaints of the limited vocabulary at his disposal, seem to prove that these impediments are not imaginary. Since Symonds wrote,

however, a view differing in some respects has been expressed by one of the few living men who may claim to be regarded as masters of Italian prose, Gabriele d'Annunzio. In the dedicatory preface to his *Trionfo della Morte* (1894), D'Annunzio enters into the question of the adequacy of the Italian language to express modern ideas, which he emphatically asserts. There is no respect, he declares, in which it need envy other tongues, or anything that it need wish to borrow from them. The misfortune is that its great resources are neglected by modern writers, whose ordinary vocabulary is limited to a few hundred words, many of illegitimate extraction or hopelessly disfigured by vulgar usage, and these thrown into sentences of nearly uniform length, destitute of logical connection and of the rhythmical accompaniment indispensable to a fine style. The remedy is a return to the old authors ; and, justly remarking that the novelists of the best period are entirely out of harmony with modern requirements by reason of their wholly objective character and incapacity for psychological analysis, D'Annunzio seriously advises modern romancers to enrich their vocabulary and perfect their style by a course of the ancient ascetic, casuistical, and devotional writers. The Zolas of modern Italy resorting for instruction to St. Catherine of Siena would indeed afford a scene for Aristophanes ; yet from a merely stylistic point of view the advice is judicious.

As regards the ancient writers, the effect would be to renovate them instead of rendering them more archaic, as anticipated by Symonds, so far at least as concerns their vocabulary. Although perhaps an inevitable tribute to Time and Evolution, it is yet no gain to the English language or literature that so much of our early writers

should be obsolete; and Italy would do well to preserve as much as possible the speech of the original masters of her tongue, which can be best effected by keeping their phraseology in constant employment. It may be hoped that a standard of taste will thus be created enabling writers to deal satisfactorily with the mass of neologisms which the great development of modern civilisation renders it impossible to exclude, but which, indiscriminately admitted, threaten to swamp and debase the national speech, or possibly to sunder the common inheritance into two languages, one for the scholar, the other for the multitude. It is, indeed, a most serious problem for patriotic scholars in all nations how to preserve the continuity of the national speech amid the vicissitudes of the national life, and the tendencies which in the intellectual as in the physical sphere are always at work to wear all diversities down to one monotonous level. The consolation is that, whereas these agencies are mere unconscious forces, called into being by causes independent of the human will, the resisting influences have their origin in the will, and are capable of intelligent direction. It should be the task of the cultivators of every literature to ascertain what course this literature has instinctively shaped for itself; what are the dominant ideas which have determined the course of its development. In Italy, from the first lyrists down to Carducci, from the first prose writers down to D'Annunzio, the guiding principle would seem to have been the love of perfect form and artistic finish, liable, like all other meritorious tendencies, to abuse, when its too exclusive pursuit has cramped originality; to aberration, when writers, remembering the end, have mistaken the means; but on the whole a right

and laudable aim, because in harmony with the genius of the people and the language. As it has been said that what is not clear is not French, so it might be added that what is not refined is not Italian.

Notwithstanding the production of much inferior work, this character still appertains to the literature in its best contemporary examples, the only ones with which posterity is likely to concern itself. The enormous recent development, nevertheless, of the sphere of human interests; the creation of new arts and sciences, necessitating a corresponding expansion of the resources of language; the facility of intercourse among peoples, tending to a cosmopolitanism which continually threatens to obliterate national distinctions; the formation of an immense and imperfectly trained reading class, to whose tastes the majority of authors must or at all events will condescend—these are trying circumstances for every literature, and especially for one whose special claims are polish and dignity. But if it be true that these latter qualities are not imported, or imposed by external pressure, but inherent in the constitution of the nation itself, it may well be hoped that they will adapt themselves to the circumstances of the present, without breach of continuity with the past. Up to the present time this continuity appears to us unbroken, and we have been able to conceive of the history of Italian literature as biography, not so much of individual writers as of a single fair spirit living through them all, which has moulded, animated, and laid aside all in their turn. Like other finite existences, this spirit has known infancy, adolescence, and maturity, and must one day know decay and death; but the phenomena accompanying her present development seem to us rather to

indicate that, in common with other literatures, she is traversing a crisis than that she is entering upon a period of decadence. Every age of letters has its own peculiar peril: that of ours is the debasement of the standard of writing to the level of imperfectly educated readers. Against this danger Italian literature should be especially protected by its close affinity to the languages of antiquity, by uniform practice and tradition ever since Dante called Love *the fountain of fair speech*,[1] and by a refinement so deeply imbibed that it seems to have become a part of itself.

[1] "*Risponde il fonte del gentil parlare.*"
—Sonnet XLII.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

THE number of books which may be usefully consulted on various points of Italian literature is very considerable. Only the most important can be named here, and those for the most part such as are written in English or Italian, and fall strictly under the heads of literary history or bibliography, or standard editions with indispensable commentaries. Many books not referable to any of these classes, such as Burckhardt's *Cicerone*, Des Brosses's *Letters*, or Dennistoun's *Lives of the Dukes of Urbino*, are incidentally of high value, but cannot be enumerated in a bibliographical list. Some few biographies, however, have been added which may be deemed essential. The dates given are in general those of the best or most accessible editions. Some of the most important are out of print.

GENERAL COLLECTIONS OF ITALIAN AUTHORS

D'Ancona and Bacci, *Manuale della Letteratura italiana*, 5 vols. 1893–95. A most admirable selection, both for its soundness of judgment and its comprehensiveness. The notices of the various authors prefixed to the selections are excellent from the biographical and bibliographical points of view, and also from the critical when criticism is sufficiently full, which is not always the case.—Cantù, *La Letteratura italiana esposta*, &c., 1851, and Morandi, *Antologia*, 1893, are inferior to D'Ancona and Bacci, yet deserve attention.

GENERAL HISTORIES

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standing occasional paradoxes, his appreciations are in general sound, although he is naturally inclined to bear hardly upon authors who fail to attain his standard of patriotism.—De Sanctis, *Storia della Letteratura italiana*, 1879. Very good, but deficient in the spirit and fire of Settembrini.—Fenini, *Letteratura italiana*, 1889. The model of an abbreviated handbook; and the same may be said of its English counterpart, Snell's *Primer of Italian Literature*, 1893.

POPULAR POETRY

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PREDECESSORS AND CONTEMPORARIES OF DANTE

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DANTE

There is, perhaps, as much commentary upon Dante as upon all the rest of Italian literature put together. The most charming edition, when comment is not needed, is that of Dr. Edward Moore, 1894, where all Dante's works are compressed into one small and exquisitely printed volume; but few students can dispense with a commentary, and it is generally advisable to read Dante in a modern Italian edition, with notes in that language. Of several excellent editions of this description, the best, perhaps, is Fraticelli's, 1892. For profound students, Ferrazzi, *Manuale Dantesco*, 1865, and Poletto, *Dizionario Dantesco*, 1885, are indispensable. A similar and not less important work in English, by Mr. Paget Toynbee, is now in the press. Of the numerous introductions to the *Divine Comedy*, the following may be recommended to English readers: Scartazzini, *Companion to Dante*, translated by A. J. Butler, 1895; Symonds, *Introduction to Dante*, 1890; Maria Francesca Rossetti, *A Shadow of Dante*, 1884; Dean Church, *Dante*, 1878; and A. J. Butler, *Dante*,

1895. Of these, Scartazzini is the scholar and Dantophilist, Symonds and Butler are the efficient critics from the modern point of view, and Miss Rossetti and Dean Church represent Dante's own position. Moore's *Studies in Dante*, now in course of publication, and Wicksteed's *Sermons on Dante*, have a wider scope than that of an introductory manual. The point of Dante's influence on posterity has been investigated by Oelsner, *Influence of Dante on Modern Thought*, 1895; and his relation to his own countrymen is discussed in the third volume of Dean Plumptre's translation of the *Divine Comedy*. He is treated from the neo-catholic point of view by Ozanam, *Dante et la Philosophie catholique*, 1845.

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PETRARCH

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BOCCACCIO

Koerting's life of Boccaccio in the second volume of his *Geschichte* is the best; and the English reader may consult Symonds, *Giovanni Boccaccio*, 1895.

ITALIAN NOVEL

Perhaps the fullest account of the Italian novelists in an English book is that in Dunlop's *History of Fiction*, as edited by Wilson, 1888. See also Papanti, *Catalogo dei Novelieri italiani*, 1871, and the notices prefixed to the specimens translated in Thomas Roscoe's *Italian Novelists*, 1832.

ITALIAN DRAMA

The fullest accounts of individual Italian dramatists will be found in Ginguené. The beginning of the Italian drama is investigated by D'Ancona in his *Origini del Teatro in Italia*, 1891 ; see also the volumes (iv.–vii.) devoted to Italy in Klein's *Geschichte des Dramas*. D'Ancona has written a monograph on the *Sacre Rappresentazioni* (see p. 226). The *Commedia dell' Arte* (pp. 305–307) is treated in Scherillo's monograph with this title, in Maurice Sand's *Masques et Bouffons*, and in Symonds's preface to his translation of the memoirs of Carlo Gozzi, 1892.

ROMANTIC POETRY

This subject is most fully treated in general histories, whether of Italian or romantic literature. Panizzi's introduction to his edition of Boiardo and Ariosto (1831), though in many respects erroneous or antiquated, deserves attention, as does Ferrario, *Storia ed Analisi degli antichi Romanzi di Cavalleria*, 1828–29. Ariosto's indebtedness to earlier romancers has been investigated by Rajna, *Le Fonti dell' Orlando Furioso*. Leigh Hunt's *Stories from the Italian Poets* is a charming companion to Italian chivalric poetry.

ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

The best view of the Renaissance as a whole is to be obtained from Symonds's great work, *The Renaissance in Italy*, 1875–81. A new edition is in course of issue. Much of this comprehensive book relates to politics, and much to art ; but so complete in the Renaissance period was the interpenetration of all forms of mental activity that no part of the work is useless for the study of literature. The same may be said of almost all modern biographies of leading Italians of the period, of most collections of letters, and of such books as Bisticci's memoirs of his contemporaries (p. 107). A useful abridged account of the

scholars of the early period of the Renaissance will be found in Villari's *Life of Machiavelli;* and authors of later date are noticed in Roscoe's *Life of Leo X.* The dissemination of literature upon the invention of printing is illustrated by Horatio Brown in his *Venetian Printing Press*, 1892.

TASSO

All previous biographies are superseded by Solerti's, 1895.

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Crescimbeni, *Vite degl' Arcadi Illustri*, 1704–13.—Cantù, *L'Abate Parini e la Lombardia nel Secolo XVIII°.*—Carducci, *Parini.*—Vernon Lee, *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy*, 1880. Much of this brilliant book is devoted to music and the stage, but the literary element is never long absent.

NINETEENTH CENTURY

The most valuable essays on Italian literature in the nineteenth century are at present to be found in periodicals, especially the *Nuova Antologia* and the *Deutsche Rundschau;* in general works on Italy like Mariotti's; in the biographies and correspondence of distinguished authors of the period, and in such monographs upon them as Zumbini's *Sulle Poesie di Vincenzo Monti.* Modern Italian poetry is well treated by W. D. Howells, *Modern Italian Poets*, 1887; by F. Sewall in his introduction to his translations from Carducci, 1892; and in the preface and biographical introductions to Greene's *Italian Lyrists of To-Day*, 1893.

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